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by
ANTHONY WYNNE

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RED SCAR

CHAPTER I

"WHEN A WOMAN IS INFATUATED"

"WHEN a woman is what you call infatuated, my dear Alaister, she ceases, apparently, to be a reasonable being. I have come to you because you are the only person I know who has any real influence over Phyllis."

Major Lionel Leyland paced the floor of Alaister Diarmid's study as he spoke. He walked with long strides but his movement, nevertheless, was jerky.

"Till she met this fellow Raoul Featherstone," he added, "Phyllis seemed to be entirely devoted to myself. I used to flatter myself that I possessed a wife in a thousand. And now she tells me, calmly, that she must leave me for the good of her own soul."

Lionel Leyland stood still. An expression of bewilderment appeared on his good-looking, rather scholarly face.

"I have seen my rival!" he said simply. "I confess that I cannot understand where his attractiveness lies."

Alaister Diarmid took his pipe from his mouth. His big, heavy face was thrust forward.

"My experience has been," he declared, "that it is

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safer to trust the dog-like qualities in women than their intelligence. The difference between a man and a woman is this: a man thinks first and feels afterwards, whereas a woman feels first and usually doesn't think at all . . . not, at any rate, so long as her emotions are active. Raoul Featherstone has no brains but he's got the other thing . . . you must play the waiting game."

"What do you mean?"

"That the pup makes love to every woman he meets, unconsciously, without being able to help himself. Love-making is a function of his nature, like breathing, and he's as weak as water where women are concerned. A lady's man, believe me, is not a man who knows how to attract women; he's a man who knows how to get rid of them. Featherstone has never got rid of any woman in his life. He is perpetually being mobbed by the women he does not know how to get rid of."

Alaister struck a match to relight his pipe. But he allowed the match to burn out before he applied it to the bowl.

"The best thing you can do," he said, "is to let well, or ill, alone. Phyllis, if I may say so, is not my cousin for nothing. The black streak of the Diarmids is in her blood—selfishness. Sooner or later, if she goes, she'll come back to you because you are obviously a better proposition than Raoul. Besides, married women always come back to their husbands."

Alaister struck another match and lit his pipe. He smoked in silence, watching Lionel Leyland with narrowed eyes. The thought crossed his mind that a soldier, who was also a classical scholar of distinction, was no mate for such a woman as Phyllis. What

"WHEN A WOMAN IS INFATUATED"

did a woman such as Phyllis care for the learning which is contained in books! What did she care for the achievements of unattractive, childish old men in University towns . . . ! And yet Lionel was not a true representative of the academic type. Under the scholar, under the soldier, the man still lived. Phyllis's infatuation for Raoul was discovering the man.

"Sooner or later isn't good enough for me," Lionel Leyland burst out. "I want Phyllis now, to-day. I never knew before how much I wanted her." He began to pace the floor again. "Do you know that it would clean my soul if I could take that pup by the throat and squeeze the life out of him. That's what every fibre of my being urges me to do. . . ."

He broke off and rubbed his brow so that he left streaks of pallor on it. The pallid streaks gradually became bright red.

"I think it is my pride which is hurt so much," he added, "but I am not sure. Because if Phyllis came back to me I know that I would welcome her. Yes, I would welcome her. Somehow or other I need Phyllis. The world seems damnably empty without her. Even the streets have a grey look: we used to get so much pleasure out of those grey streets. . . ."

He strode to the window and stood looking out at Alaister's garden. His eyes came to the red roof, gleaming between two big ash trees, which he knew was Raoul Featherstone's studio.

"I suppose," he muttered, "that artists are always specially attractive to women . . . even rotten artists like Featherstone."

"Artists . . . and movie stars—men with women's

RED SCAR

minds." Alaister joined his visitor at the window. "Listen," he commanded in his husky tones, "you're not the only victim of my neighbour's superior attractiveness. Do you remember that little girl, Echo Wildermere, who used to sit for me occasionally?"

Lionel Leyland turned.

"The girl who looked like Phyllis?"

"I remember you said that about her; yes. . . . Well, after a fashion, my own fashion, I allowed myself to get fond of her. I used to wonder whether or not I could endure her every day and all day. I decided that I could endure her. . . . I was just going to tell her of my decision when I met her, yesterday, with Featherstone."

Alaister laughed bitterly.

"She's been sitting for me lately—I'll show you the thing before you go. She came here this morning as pink as a rosebud, and I hadn't the heart to undeceive her."

He gripped Lionel's arm suddenly. . . .

"I thought Echo was a woman with stuff in her; I fooled myself into believing I was developing the strong elements of her character."

He laughed again.

"I might have known better. She told me herself that my statue of her expressed something disagreeable. Raoul paints 'em all like the front of chocolate boxes and makes love to 'em all in the best outer ring of the suburbs style. And they like it, Lionel, my lad, they like it. Women are life's inevitable disappointment unless one happens to be a fool or a rogue. . . . If you don't believe me go to the first auction sale of furniture you see advertised and look about

"WHEN A WOMAN IS INFATUATED"

you at the 'engaged girls', as the newspapers call 'em, building their little nests."

He broke off suddenly because Lionel's face had become very pale. Lionel's fists were clenched so that his knuckles showed white.

"The damned scoundrel. . . ."

"Oh, rubbish. I tell you he can't help himself. Echo'll find him out in time same as Phyllis will. Woman is all the better for gettin' her experience of men. The real reason why most marriages are failures is that most women are inexperienced when they marry. . . ."

Alaister took Lionel's arm and led him across the lounge to a door at the far end of it. He opened the door disclosing his workroom. A big statue, over which a dust-sheet had been thrown, stood in the middle of the floor. Alaister pulled the sheet away and flung it into a corner of the room.

"There, that's my *Andromeda looking at the Sea Monster*."

He stood back to allow his visitor an uninterrupted view of the statue. He watched Lionel's face with greedy eyes. He saw a slight frown gather on Lionel's face.

"Well?"

Lionel took a step back from the statue.

"Do you know, my dear fellow," he said, "it . . . it does seem to me to express something disagreeable. . . ."

He continued to regard the statue frowningly.

"Is your idea," he asked, "that Andromeda was really in love with the Monster?"

"Of course. . . . Didn't I tell you that I had flattered myself I was developing Echo's character.

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Echo, I felt, was the kind of woman who would prefer an honest Monster to any number of lovers with wings on their heels."

A light step sounded in the lounge behind them. Alaister turned sharply to greet Echo herself.

CHAPTER II

SURETY

ECHO still looked as pink as a rosebud. Lionel glanced from her merry face to the pleasure-haunted features of Alaister's "Andromeda"; what a pity that so great an artist as Alaister should see only the sordid side of human nature. He turned to Echo again. He compressed his lips. In some incomprehensible way the girl's face had changed. He saw in her face exactly what Alaister had seen.

And then as suddenly as it had come the vision was blotted out. He took Echo's hand and looked into her grey eyes, but he saw only the girl who bore so bewildering a likeness to his own wife. He winced under the sting of that resemblance. Echo turned to Alaister.

"Congratulate me," she cried in eager tones.

"On what?"

"On my engagement to Raoul." She caught her breath. "I felt I would like to tell you the first of all."

She stood a little distance away from the two men, with parted lips. The colour in her cheeks fluttered deliciously. Alaister raised his eyebrows.

"But this is so sudden, my dear," he muttered.

"Oh, I have known Raoul a good while. Shall I tell you a secret? I was sitting for Raoul at the same

RED SCAR

time as I was sitting for you." She smiled and made a little grimace. "Raoul's portrait, you know, is much more flattering than your statue."

Alaister took his pipe from his pocket and began to fill it from a big oilskin pouch. His rather clumsy fingers made slow work of the process.

"Sit down, sit down," he said. "Lolotte will be bringing tea in a minute or two."

He waved his hand towards one of his big leather arm-chairs. He was going to invite Lionel to take the other arm-chair when, suddenly, a look of uneasiness appeared on his face. Lionel's expression was as grim as judgement. Lionel's hands, too, were clenched as they had been clenched while he was talking about Phyllis. Alaister took a step towards Lionel and caught him by the sleeve.

"For God's sake, don't," he growled, "it would be brutal."

He tried to lead Lionel back to his workroom, but the attempt was made too late. The soldier was already captive to his sense of duty. A queer, cold light shone in Lionel's blue eyes as he declared :

"I am going to tell her."

He strode across the room to Echo.

"My wife," he stated, "informed me to-day that she and Raoul Featherstone are so deeply in love with one another that she cannot continue to live under my roof. I am very sorry to have to tell you this but I would be sorrier still if you remained ignorant of it."

Lionel's face became almost gentle as he spoke. He bent down and took Echo's hand, but she snatched it away from him. There was a knock at the door and then the pleasant jingle of tea-cups on a metal tray came to their ears. A maid-servant with

SURETY

red hair entered the room and put the tray down on a corner of Alaister's big desk. She brought a little folding table from the far end of the room and set it up near the fireplace.

"Bring another cup, Lolotte," Alaister ordered.

"Not for me, please. I don't want any tea." Echo's cheeks, as she spoke, flushed hotly. Defiance glowed in her eyes. She added : "I'm having tea with Raoul in town and then we're going to choose my engagement ring."

She began to draw on her gloves ; Lolotte finished setting up the tea-table and put the tray on the table. She was about to leave the room when Alaister told her to cover up his statue. He accompanied her to the door of his workroom so that she should not close the door while she was obeying his order. Then he came and placed himself between Echo and Lionel.

"Listen to me, child," he said to Echo, "before you go away. Raoul is one of those unlucky fellows with whom every woman he sees falls in love. It isn't his fault any more than it's my fault that no woman ever falls in love with me. It's in the nature of things. I don't know whether he ever felt attracted by my cousin Phyllis or not ; but I'm ready to bet that, in your case, the attraction is the genuine article. Shall I tell you why I know that ? "

He paused and filled his lungs with a deep breath. He towered over Echo.

"Because, by God, I love you myself."

He paused again. He saw a look of bewilderment come into Echo's eyes. He laughed in his hoarse, bitter fashion.

"So don't go asking Raoul silly, awkward questions

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about Phyllis or anybody else. Let me be your surety for him. Women who can get me can get anybody. D'ye see? Forget about what you've been told here . . . and be happy. Good Lord, what's that . . . ?"

A crash had resounded from the workroom. Alaister sprang to the door. He saw his statue of Andromeda lying shattered on the floor. Lolotte stood gazing at the ruin she had wrought with horrified eyes.

"It . . . it fell over. . . ."

Alaister put his big hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Don't vex yourself," he said. "It's only a cast. I'll soon make another. Tell your father to come and give me a hand with the plaster of paris when he's finished his tea."

CHAPTER III

IN THE STUDIO

ALAISTER put off the recasting of his statue from hour to hour. When dinner-time came he was still as far as ever from any inclination to begin the work.

He ate his dinner alone, in the small, panelled dining-room which, for two centuries at least before he bought the place and "adapted" it, had served to stable the horses of English squires. His attractive room gave him no joy to-night. He thought that it seemed empty and dismal. He glanced at the solemn face of Kennedy, his butler, and reflected that this uneventful man had at least known how to win and keep the love of a woman. And now that Kennedy's wife was dead, his daughters, Lolotte and her younger sister, supplied him with an object in life.

"Have you got that house in Flask Lane you were looking at, Kennedy?" he asked when the meal came to an end.

"Yes, sir. My sister is living there now."

Kennedy's face relaxed in a smile. He added:

"I always did want my girls to 'ave some place they could call their 'ome."

He fidgeted on his feet, like, Alaister thought, a dog wagging its tail. The satisfaction, which playing the part of an indulgent father gave him, beamed from his eyes. Kennedy belonged emphatically to

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that order of humanity which rejoices to act as buffer between a rough world and those it calls its own, that order of humanity which asks no thanks since it knows how to thank itself.

"Your younger daughter has gone out to service, hasn't she?"

"Yes, sir. To Lady Ambledown's, sir. And I've 'ad a very good report of 'er already from the 'ouse-keeper. In a manner of speaking, sir, my Anita's a steadier-going girl than my Lolotte. Lolotte, she takes after 'er poor mother wot 'ad a dash of French blood in 'er veins, whereby Anita takes after me. . . . Your statue now, wot Lolotte broke to-day; Anita would never 'ave been so careless. . . ."

Kennedy paused and fidgeted again so that Alaister experienced a sharp sense of exasperation. But that feeling flickered out as quickly as it had come. Alaister leaned back in his chair.

"Oh, poor Lolotte. I blame myself for telling her to cover it. It was much too tall for her. . . ."

He rose and returned to his workroom. He set up the piece-mould of Andromeda and then filled a big basin with dry plaster. He heard the clock in the steeple of Hampstead Parish Church strike ten and stood still, listening. The kitchen door opened and Kennedy and Lolotte, Lolotte first and Kennedy a moment afterwards, ascended the stairs to their bedrooms. What a mind the man had, like an eight-day clock!

Alaister sat down in the only arm-chair the room possessed and began to fill his pipe. After all, perhaps Kennedy was right in his close supervision of his daughters' behaviour. The majority of young women nowadays seemed to be bored to death. They expected

IN THE STUDIO

new excitement all the time. He lit his pipe and threw the match on the bare floor. That was the secret of the popularity of Raoul and men such as Raoul. They purveyed the kind of excitement which empty-headed unoccupied women craved for.

Alaister closed his eyes but opened them immediately to watch a long whiff of smoke go coiling and uncoiling towards the raftered ceiling. It was a pity that Echo should have fallen a victim to Raoul's love-making because Echo was not empty-headed like Phyllis. Sooner or later she would see through the boy and hate him. When that happened, anything might happen. . . .

Alaister awoke with a start. The sound, which had awakened him, was repeated, an insistent knocking on his front door. He jumped up and strode through his lounge to the door. He unlocked the door and flung it open.

"Echo!"

He took a step back to allow Echo to enter. Then he put out his hands to support her because her face was so dreadfully pale.

"What has happened?"

"Raoul," she whispered. . . . "I . . . I think he's dead. . . . Oh, please come. . . ."

Echo leaned against the side of the door and then seemed to pull herself together. Alaister noted mechanically that she was hatless and without a cloak. Then an exclamation of dismay broke from his lips. Her neck was streaked with blood and the sleeve of her evening frock was torn.

"You're hurt. . . ."

"No, no. . . ." She turned and ran out across the

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lawn towards the low wall which separated Raoul's studio from Alaister's garden. As he followed he felt fear and anxiety clutching at his heart, a sense of disaster impending which robbed him of his strength. They came to the wall and he helped Echo to cross it. The windows of the studio were lighted. He ran past the lighted windows to the door and entered before the girl. Raoul was lying on his back on the floor with Echo's cloak wrapped about his neck. There was a big stain of blood on the white cloak.

He knelt down and lifted Raoul's hand, but its limpness caused him to release it again immediately. He bent over the boy so that his ear nearly touched the parted lips. He caught the faintest sound of breathing. After a moment he drew the silken cloak gently away from Raoul's neck, exposing the bare skin. The margin of a wound from which blood still trickled met his gaze. He removed the cloak and pressed his handkerchief into the wound. Then he told Echo to bring a towel from the boy's bedroom, above the studio. He tore the towel into strips and made a rough bandage of it.

He was able to apply this bandage firmly because the wound was situated low down at the back of the neck. Raoul groaned while the bandaging was in progress and once he opened his eyes and murmured something which Alaister could not understand. When the work was complete Alaister took a pillow which Echo had fetched from the bedroom and put it under Raoul's head. Then he turned to the girl.

"You must go home at once," he declared.

"No. I am going to stay here with him."

Echo's face was ghastly and the streaks of blood on

IN THE STUDIO

her neck and shoulders and her torn frock added to the ghastliness. She caught at Alaister's arm to steady herself.

"I found him like this," she declared. "Then he attacked me. . . ."

Her voice failed and her head sank on her breast. Alaister put his arms about her and lifted her in his arms. He carried her out of the studio to the boundary wall and raised her on to the wall. A moment later he brought her to the door of his garage. He was going to lay her on the ground while he opened the garage, but she recovered her strength and resisted him.

"Please, you mustn't take me home now," she pleaded. "Oh, do leave me and get a doctor for Raoul. . . ."

"No."

There was a peremptory note in his voice. He left her leaning against the side of the house and unlocked the garage door. Then he took her arm and led her to his car.

"I can't look after both of you at the same time," he declared, "and Raoul is all right for the moment. . . ."

He helped her to enter the car and took his seat beside her.

CHAPTER IV

"TELL NOBODY"

"TELL me exactly what happened?"

Alaister did not turn towards Echo as he spoke. She saw his face, set and tense, by the light of the street lamps. The thought flashed through her mind that he looked handsomer than she had ever seen him look before.

"I have told you. Raoul went back home to change after we finished our shopping. He said he would come for me to go dancing. When he didn't come I got nervous and went to see what had happened to him."

Echo's voice was low, and it had a distant quality as if she was speaking in a dream. She added:

"Mother has gone out to a bridge party; I was alone all the evening."

The car reached the top of Holly Tree Hill. Alaister slackened speed and turned to the girl at his side.

"Why did he attack you?" he asked in his hoarse tones.

"I don't know."

They came to No. 3. Echo pleaded once more that she might be allowed to return to Raoul but she swayed in her seat as she spoke. Alaister helped her to descend from the car and supported her across the pavement. She gave him her key and he opened the front door

"TELL NOBODY"

for her. He switched up the lights and accompanied her into the little drawing-room.

"Has your mother come home, do you suppose?"

"Yes. She's taken her hot bottle. . . ."

Echo indicated an india-rubber bottle which lay on a stool near the fireplace. She explained:

"That's my one." She clutched at Alaister's arm.

"Do please go back to him. . . ."

She looked up in his face and saw the gathered lines of anxiety which scarred it. His eyes met her eyes and challenged them. His eyes were full of fear.

"Nobody," he declared, "knows that you visited Raoul's studio to-night. I want you to promise me that nobody shall know . . . not even your mother."

"Why? . . ."

He grasped her by the shoulders. . . .

"Because there's going to be trouble about this business, and the less you are mixed up in it the better. . . . Do you understand? Raoul has been stabbed . . . murdered perhaps. . . ."

He broke off and turned away from her.

"For God's sake tell me the truth . . . why he attacked you."

"I don't know why he attacked me."

Echo was calm now and her face had recovered a little of its colour. He saw on her face the very expression which he had imprinted on the features of his statue of Andromeda, a lovely mingling of ecstasy and grief and naughtiness. A fierce impulse to seize her and drag the truth from her ripe lips shook him, and for a moment deprived him of breath.

"Please tell nobody," he ordered, "until I give you leave to tell. . . . Nobody!"

He left her and sprang into his car. As he drove down

RED SCAR

the hill to Frogmal his mind became clear again and cold. He left the car in the unlighted private road which led from Frogmal Lane to his garden door. Then he walked across the lawn to the boundary wall and climbed over into Raoul's garden.

Raoul was lying exactly where they had left him. A red stain had appeared on the bandage but it did not seem to be spreading. He satisfied himself that the boy was still breathing. Then he raised him in his arms and carried him out to the wall. He lifted him on to the top of the wall, just as he had lifted Echo, and went back to switch off the lights in the studio. A moment later he deposited Raoul on the couch in his own room.

His plan was made. When he had cleared up the mess in the studio he would take Raoul in his car to the Hampstead General Hospital and say that he had found him lying near his own gate. The police might exercise their wits on that problem. . . . He bent over the boy and listened to his breathing. He counted :

"One . . . two . . . three . . . four. . . ."

He stiffened suddenly: Raoul's breathing had stopped. He snatched frantically at the pulse but could not feel it. Raoul began to moan and he thought he heard the word "Echo. . . ."

Alaister drew his hand across his wet brow. . . .

"It's all right, old man," he whispered in tones of great relief. "It's all right."

He waited until the breathing resumed its rhythm. Then he brought one of the dust-sheets from his workroom and spread it over the couch. He returned to his workroom and placed the huge piece-mould of Andromeda in position for filling. He could still detect Raoul's breathing when he came back to the couch,

"TELL NOBODY"

but it had grown much fainter. Was the boy dying? Alaister called him by name and then grasped his hand which hung over the side of the couch. But there was no response. He put his hand on the boy's brow and, very gently, raised one of the eyelids. He saw that the pupil of the eye was no bigger than a pin-point. The eyelid moved slowly back into position when he released it.

He got up and strode to the telephone feeling that he must summon a doctor. But with the instrument in his hand he hesitated. What did Raoul's life matter to him against Echo's safety? . . . On the other hand he might say that he himself had wounded Raoul. . . . By God, no, he had no stomach for martyrdom of that sort. . . . And the police were so efficient nowadays; they would find out the truth. He put the telephone instrument down heavily so that the receiver fell from its hook. While he was replacing the receiver he fancied he heard a man's voice asking him for his "number please" . . . Anyhow, you can't see through a telephone. . . . Yes, the police would be sure to find out the truth once they got wind of the business. . . . They would soon prove that Echo had been to the studio. . . .

But perhaps, after all, Echo had not struck the blow. . . .

He came back unsteadily to the couch and stood looking down at the pale face of Echo's lover. Of course, Echo had not struck the blow. Of course not. He declared aloud: "Of course not!"

Why should she, anyhow, since she was in love with Raoul and he with her? So it wouldn't matter if the police . . . Good God!

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He knelt down. All the colour had faded out of Raoul's cheeks.

"Raoul . . . Raoul, old man. *Raoul, old man.* . . ."

No breathing now. No pulse, or anyhow none that a man who wasn't a doctor could feel. So the fellow was dead. Raoul was dead. Murdered. How damned strange! Alaister pulled the dust-sheet right over Raoul's face and then, quickly, folded it back again. Perhaps he wasn't quite dead yet. . . . It would be as well to wait and see whether or not he was quite dead. He put his hand into his pocket and took out his pipe. He was trying to remember what are the usual tests for death.

It was extraordinary how cool his mind was . . . not a ripple, now, on that smooth surface. If Raoul was really dead he must get rid of Raoul's body. He must hide it where nobody would ever find it so that nobody could ever be accused of . . . Damned fool, the police always found dead bodies sooner or later. . . . Still, unless a body was found no charge of murder would lie; everybody knew that. The law was clear on that point. . . . He came back to the couch and listened again to hear if Raoul was breathing. No, he wasn't. He lifted one of the boy's hands and released it. It fell limp from his grasp. Undoubtedly he was dead.

He switched out the light and walked to the door. He looked out cautiously on the darkness. An owl hooted and he waited to hear the second notes of the call. Then he crossed the lawn. It was wonderfully cool and calm out here on the hills above London. He dropped down softly over the wall and crept round to the door of the studio. He struck a match

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and snatched up Echo's hat and cloak. The match flamed brightly for an instant and showed him a dark patch on the floor where Raoul had lain. Blood. So he must make yet another journey or the police, after all, would discover their clue.

CHAPTER V

THE STAIN ON THE FLOOR

AN hour later Alaister returned to Raoul's studio. He had brought a small bowl of water and an electric torch with him. He placed the torch, lighted, so that its beam fell on the bloodstains on the floor, and then began to scrub the stain with a nail-brush. While he was engaged on this task he noticed that the pillow which he had placed under Raoul's head was also stained with blood.

He rose from his knees and carried the pillow up the wooden stair which led to Raoul's bedroom. He cleaned the pillow as well as he could and then flung it on the bed. Then he descended again, torch in hand, to the studio and resumed his scrubbing. He worked slowly and methodically.

Suddenly he started to his feet. Heavy steps were approaching the door of the studio. He flung the contents of the bowl of water across the room and set the bowl down on one of the window-ledges, then he strode to the door and opened it. A lantern was flashed in his face.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Diarmid," a gruff voice apologized.

"Yes, constable. . . ." Alaister raised his hand to shield his eyes from the light. Had this policeman been watching him? A sense of great apprehension

THE STAIN ON THE FLOOR

overwhelmed him and made it impossible to collect his thoughts. Happily the policeman shut his lantern.

"I was a bit nervous when I saw your light," the policeman explained, "because when I was coming up Langland Gardens, about an hour ago, I saw a man coming out of this 'ouse carrying something in his arms. The windows were lighted and so I didn't think, at the time, that there could be anything amiss."

He paused. Alaister realized that he was challenging him for an explanation. He passed the circumstances of the case in swift review through his mind and took his decision.

"You saw me," he declared.

"I thought it was you, because I 'appen to know that you and Mr. Raoul Featherstone is friends as well as neighbours."

Still the man's voice seemed to challenge. Was it possible that he had observed Echo also when she came out of the studio or when she returned to it?

"Listen, constable," Alaister said. "Mr. Featherstone has been the victim of foul play. I was in my garden to-night and heard a cry. I found him lying on the floor here. I carried him to my house and did what I could for him. . . ."

He broke off and stood waiting in tense silence for the policeman's response. If the man had seen Echo he would scarcely, now, keep that discovery to himself.

"Gawd sir, 'e ain't dead, is 'e?"

"I'm afraid he is."

Alaister breathed once more, for the man's face expressed bewilderment as well as shock. He added:

"I came over here to see if I could find any trace of

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the murderer. Now that you've appeared, you'd better view the body at once and make a report."

Alaister wiped his brow. How glibly these suggestions came from his lips ; and in the proper form, too ! He might have been rehearsing this scene for weeks. And the policeman, obviously, was impressed. He had not abated his deference in the least degree. They came out into the night and Alaister glanced up at the stars. He called the policeman's attention to the fact that Hampstead is darker on starry nights because, then, there are no clouds to mirror the lights of London.

"It would be the easiest thing in the world to slip away through these gardens to-night . . ." he declared. "Mr. Featherstone had some strange acquaintances. . . ."

They gained Alaister's lawn. When they came to his house Alaister stood back to allow the policeman to enter before him. He followed the policeman into his lounge. . . .

The room was empty.

CHAPTER VI

STRANGE

THE policeman turned to face Alaister, evidently expecting to be conducted to a bedroom. But Alaister's eyes were blank.

"I brought him in here," he stated, "I left him here. . . ."

He glanced about him in a bewildered fashion and then pointed to the couch.

"That's where he was lying."

The red face of the policeman became a shade redder and his small eyes developed a look of suspicion.

"'E couldn't run away if 'e was dead," he remarked in brisk tones. "Somebody must 'ave moved him. . . ."

He looked round the room as he spoke. Then he went to the door of the workroom and opened it. He switched on the light. The floor was splashed with plaster. A newly-cast statue of Andromeda stood facing him on its pedestal.

"Nothing 'ere."

Alaister had accompanied him across the room. Now he, too, scanned the bare walls of the workroom. He entered the room and lifted one of the dust-sheets which had been flung into a corner. He shook the

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dust-sheet as if he feared that Raoul's body might be hidden in its folds.

"It's devilish strange. . . ."

He flung the sheet away. . . .

"I wonder if he really was dead," he exclaimed.

The policeman was shepherding his wits into their accustomed places. He had taken out his note-book and he was busy taking out his pencil. He set pencil to page and filled his big lungs with air.

"As I understands you," he said, "you carried Mr. Raoul Featherstone into this 'ouse about an hour ago and set 'im down on that there sofa. And, at the moment of settin' 'im down 'e was . . ."

"Wounded . . . wounded in the neck . . . back of the neck. . . ."

Alaister shut the door of his workroom. He opened the door leading to the garden and stood looking out. The sound of a car passing through Frogmal Lane broke the dead stillness of the night. After a moment he returned to the policeman.

"Don't bother to write all that stuff down," he said. "I'll come with you to the station and make a report myself."

"No, sir, I must 'ave my own report."

The pencil proceeded firmly on its way until the words "back of the neck" had been written. Then the writer raised his eyes.

"In your opinion the man was dead?" he asked.

"Dead? . . . Oh, yes, yes, I thought he was dead."

"And in that belief you left 'im to go to 'is studio where you 'ad found him in the first instance. . . ."

"Yes. And now he isn't here. It's damned funny,

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damned queer, isn't it? Where the devil do you suppose he's gone to, eh?"

The policeman shook his head but did not interrupt his writing. How should he know? He completed his report.

"You 'ave servants, Mr. Diarmid," he stated.

"I have. Kennedy, my butler-chauffeur, and his daughter, my cook-housemaid. Both a-bed, as I happen to know, since ten o'clock. Do you want to see them?"

"I should do in the regular course, so to speak."

"Very well. . . ."

Alaister led the way across his dining-room to the wooden stair which seemed to be tucked away in the old panelling. He mounted the stair and stood waiting, at the top of it, for his companion. The stair creaked under the policeman's weight. Alaister pointed to two doors situated at opposite sides of the landing.

"That's Kennedy's. . . . That's Lolotte's."

The policeman strode to Kennedy's door and knocked on it loudly. They heard the man answer the summons, and then they heard the creaking of his bed as he left it. His feet came padding to the door and he threw it open. He switched up the lights in his room. At sight of the policeman he took a step backwards. The policeman walked into the room and looked about him. He even glanced under the bed.

"It's all right, Kennedy," Alaister said, "slip on your dressing-gown like a good fellow and come downstairs for a few minutes." Alaister turned to the constable. "Do you wish to waken the girl also?"

"Yes, sir."

Alaister knocked on Lolotte's door. He waited a few minutes and then opened the door and switched

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up the lights. The girl was asleep. She raised her arm to shield her eyes from the light but did not awake.

"I think we can leave 'er," the policeman said. "She's 'ere any'ow, as I can report at the station."

He walked to one of the other doors and opened it, and then opened each door in succession. Then he came back to the stair and began to descend it. Alaister closed Lolotte's door and followed him. A moment later Kennedy joined them in the lounge. The constable explained to him what had happened, and asked him if he had heard anything at all.

"Nothing at all."

"You and your daughter, as I understand, retired at ten o'clock?"

"Yes. We always goes to bed at ten. As soon as my 'ead touches the pillow, I'm away with it and Lolotte 'as the same 'appy knack."

Kennedy was solemn as suited the occasion and the company. But his solemnity did not cover his uneasiness. In his red dressing-gown he looked rather owlsh and his blinking eyes intensified this suggestion. He kept his eyes fixed on the note-book in which his answers were being recorded.

"Could anybody, do you think," the policeman asked, "'ave mounted the stairs without your bein' aware of it?"

"Oh, yes, easy. I never 'eard you and Mr. Diarmid coming up the stairs. . . ."

Alaister dismissed Kennedy and led the policeman into the garden.

"Mr. Featherstone," he declared, "must have recovered enough to walk out here. He may be lying

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among those bushes, or he may have wandered from the place altogether. My place isn't locked."

They searched the garden and came to the garage. The constable examined that place also. Then he stepped into the private road and opened the door of the car.

"I think, sir," he said, "that it will be necessary for me to ask you to accompany me to the station in 'Averstock 'Ill."

Alaister went back to the house to get his hat. Kennedy, still solemn and scared, was standing in the hall awaiting his return. Alaister told him to go to bed. Then he rejoined the policeman.

They walked the short distance to the station in silence because Alaister's thoughts were busy. The station was brightly lit and very warm and the inspector seemed to be a brisk man. Alaister watched his expression as he listened to the policeman's report and observed that it did not change. Evidently the inspector was accustomed to queer stories. But the man's eyes had a sharpness, when he turned to speak, which rather belied that impression.

"You agree with the report?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Have you any idea at all what can have happened to Mr. Featherstone . . . any idea of your own, I mean?"

"Only that he must have wandered off the premises. . . ."

The inspector's eyebrows descended.

"For a man whom you believed to be dead an hour before that sounds rather a big performance, doesn't it?" he asked.

"Of course. But as he isn't in my house now, he

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must have left it somehow or other. It isn't easy, so I've been told, to be sure that a person is dead. For all I know he may only have been suffering from shock. . . ."

The inspector picked up a telephone instrument.

"I'll circulate his description to the police if you give it to me," he said. "There is always the danger, if he is really wandering about, that he may come to the Regent's Canal."

CHAPTER VII

"A NAUGHTY LITTLE MAN"

"HAVE you," Inspector Biles of Scotland Yard asked Dr. Eustace Hailey, "ever heard of a man named Major Lionel Leyland?"

He watched Dr. Hailey's large, kindly face as he spoke as if it was important that he should detect the merest flicker of recognition. But Dr. Hailey's face remained impassive.

"Never, my dear Biles."

"Or of his father-in-law, Colonel Dudley Titling?" Dr Hailey's eyes began to twinkle.

"Indeed, I have. Dudley Titling was at school with me at Uppingham. Do you mean to say that he has a daughter old enough to be married?" . . . He sighed and slightly raised his great shoulders. "Titling had a very pretty sister, who is now the mother of Alaister Diarmid, the sculptor. She ran away with her husband, I remember, because her people were dead against her marrying an artist. . . ."

"So." Biles inclined his precise head. He remained silent a moment, until a specially noisy taxicab had growled its way down Harley Street. Then he announced:

"I have come to trouble you at this very late hour because Major Lionel Leyland, the husband of Colonel Titling's daughter, was found, to-night, lying

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unconscious in his study, the victim of a severe head injury."

Biles leaned forward in his chair.

"The curious feature of the case is that the front door of the house was standing open. The discovery was actually made by the policeman on duty in Curzon Street, who noticed the open door. Yet the servants heard nothing."

Dr. Hailey rose and stood in front of the fire. His huge figure had grown alert. He took a silver snuff-box from his pocket and opened it delicately.

"Go on," he invited.

"No. The story ends there . . . unless the fact that Mrs. Leyland went to stay the night with her father in Park Street is material." Biles paused and seemed to hesitate a moment. "Do you think," he asked, "that I could persuade you to come with me now to Curzon Street and make an examination of the injury?"

Dr. Hailey took snuff after the fashion of a French marquis of the old nobility.

"I think you could, my dear Biles," he said pleasantly.

They picked up a cab in Cavendish Square. When they entered the vehicle Dr. Hailey glanced at his watch.

"It's exactly half-past two," he announced. "When was the discovery made?"

"At a quarter past midnight."

"And when did the servants go to bed?"

"About ten, I think. Perhaps a little later. The butler saw his master just before ten, when he took up whisky and soda. Major Leyland was then reading a newspaper. The butler locked the front door before he returned to the servants' quarters."

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Dr. Hailey screwed his eyeglass into his eye.

"So that Major Leyland himself admitted his assailant?"

"It seems so."

The cab reached Oxford Street and crossed it.

"I find it difficult," Dr. Hailey said, "to associate Dudley Tilting with anything in the nature of a tragedy. The little beggar was cast by Nature for a comedy part . . . perhaps low comedy. I haven't seen him for years, it's true, but I was told some time ago that he hadn't changed a bit since his schooldays. I once heard a woman describe him as 'a naughty little man', but I always suspected him, myself, of being a sentimentalist at heart. He used to write silly poems for the school magazine; on the other hand, he was exceedingly resentful of any slight to his personal dignity. His sister's elopement, I remember, made him furious. Men who mingle pride with buffoonery and sentimentality live in glasshouses, my dear Biles."

The cab reached Curzon Street and stopped at No. 40y. A moment later Dr. Hailey renewed his acquaintance with Dudley Titling and was introduced by him to his daughter, Phyllis Leyland. Dudley Titling, the doctor thought, certainly had changed. But his manner still clung to him, that mixture of the gay and the ungracious which once upon a time had passed for wit. And he still clipped all his speech as they used to do in King Edward's time.

"D'evenin', Hailey. Great relief to me your comin' . . . Shockin' affair. . . . Quite shockin'. Phyllis left him fit's a fiddle. . . . Burglar probably. My readin' of the case, anyhow. Go up at once and see him, like a good fella'. . . ."

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Dudley Titling accompanied Dr. Hailey to the door of the study and came out with him into the corridor. . . . He raised his wizened little face to the doctor's face.

"Phyllis's dreadfully upset," he whispered. "Blames herself for bein' away from home, and all that sort of thing, d'ye see? Nonsense, of course, but crazy about him, quite crazy. If things are serious, tell me, old man; don't tell her. You understand, of course."

Dr. Hailey mounted the stairs slowly. It was extraordinary how closely Phyllis Leyland resembled her aunt—the girl who had run away with the artist. And yet the resemblance was incomplete. Molly Titling, on the occasions when he had met her, had given him an impression of great strength of mind, almost of hardness, whereas Phyllis was gentle. Phyllis possessed her aunt's grey eyes but not her aunt's thin lips. Phyllis's lips were full and soft. . . .

A nurse opened the bedroom door. The doctor who was attending Lionel Leyland came forward to meet Dr. Hailey and led him to the window.

"So far as I can see," he declared, "he was struck over the head with a blunt weapon of some sort. . . . There are definite signs of compression, but I don't think they are getting any more pronounced."

The doctor was a young man, named Lomond, fresh from the schools. He had all his symptoms at easy command, but Dr. Hailey's reputation awed him into reticence.

"Has he been talking?"

"Oh, yes, threatening somebody with the utmost violence."

Dr. Hailey came to the bedside. Lionel Leyland

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was sleeping restlessly. The muscles of his face twitched and his lips seemed to resist the passage of his breath. The nurse removed the bandage from his head, disclosing an area above the right temple from which the hair had been clipped. A wound with ragged edges occupied the greater part of this clipped area.

Dr. Hailey bent down and focused his eyeglass on the wound. The lower edge was much more prominent than the upper edge, suggesting that the weapon had glanced off the skull, after breaking the skin. The blow, therefore, had been struck downwards and the weapon had been a heavy one, perhaps a poker. He raised each of the eyelids and glanced at the pupils. The pupil on the right side was widely dilated, whereas that on the left side was normal in size. He returned to Dr. Lomond, who had remained at the window.

"It is just possible," he said, "that there is a depressed fracture. But I rather doubt it. In the circumstances I think we had better wait until the symptoms declare themselves more positively one way or the other."

"Very well, sir. . . ."

Suddenly Dr. Lomond, who was facing the bed, started forward. Dr. Hailey turned to see Lionel Leyland sitting up, gesticulating. When Dr. Lomond approached him he raised his hand as if to strike.

"I am going to thrash you," he cried, in passionate accents.

He tried to jump out of bed, but Dr. Lomond and the nurse restrained him. A moment later he collapsed on the pillows and fell into a stupor.

Dr. Hailey returned to the study where he was

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instantly buttonholed by Dudley Titling. He told the little man curtly that the patient stood in no immediate danger of his life, then he walked to the fender and picked up the poker. He examined the poker carefully for a few minutes. When he laid it down his face wore its habitual expression of vacancy.

He sat down and closed his eyes. He heard Biles plying Phyllis with questions which Phyllis's father insisted on answering for her . . . about her husband's friends and acquaintances and his habits and temper. Dudley Titling, apparently, had no very good opinion of his son-in-law, though he offered as an extenuation of "a shockin' temper, d'ye see," the fact that Lionel had suffered from a heat-stroke in India two years ago.

"Is your husband a jealous man?" Biles asked Phyllis.

"I . . . I don't think he is more jealous than . . . other men."

The girl's voice was so low that Dr. Hailey could only just hear it. Dr. Hailey opened his eyes. Phyllis's eyes were cast down and her cheeks were flaming.

"Must correct that statement, Inspector," Dudley Titling broke in. "Phyllis quite right, d'ye see, excusin' Lionel and all that sort of thing. Fact is Lionel's most jealous fella' livin'."

Biles recorded this statement. Dr. Hailey rose and came to Phyllis.

"Your husband," he asked in his gentle, detached way, "threatened this evening to thrash somebody, didn't he?"

He paused and waited. But the girl's reply was inaudible. Dudley Titling jumped up from his chair, exclaiming . . .

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"This evenin' and every evenin'. Lionel, my dear Hailey, is always threatenin' to thrash people. . . ."

He glanced about him like a scared sparrow. Then, as suddenly as he had risen, he sat down again.

"Please answer the doctor's question, Mrs. Leyland," Biles demanded. "Did your husband threaten this evening to thrash anybody?"

"Yes."

"Whom did he threaten to thrash?"

There was no response.

"Kindly answer my question."

Phyllis raised her head suddenly and faced the detective.

"My husband," she declared, "said that he would thrash any man who dared to make love to me."

"Ah. So your husband fancied that he had reason to be jealous?"

"Yes."

"Of whom?"

"Of everybody, Inspector. Of you and Hailey and the whole world. That's Lionel, d'ye see." Dudley Titling screwed his little face into an expression of dismay. "It's a shockin' state of affairs. Shockin'."

"I must ask you, Colonel Titling," Biles said, "not to interrupt my examination of your daughter in this fashion. It is surely obvious to you from what we have heard that some particular individual must have aroused your son-in-law's suspicions. That individual may very well be the man for whom we are looking." He turned again to Phyllis: "Be so good, Mrs. Leyland, as to tell me the name of the man against whom, particularly, your husband's threats were uttered."

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He paused. He held the point of his pencil poised above his note-book.

"I would rather not tell you."

"Forgive me. You must tell me."

An angry flush mounted to Biles's cheeks and then rose to his forehead.

"This is a serious matter," he rasped.

His lean face looked extraordinarily threatening. He was proceeding to point out that by withholding the name Phyllis was possibly shielding a criminal when Dudley Titling broke in to declare that his daughter had a perfect right to say as little or as much as she chose.

"Isn't a Court of Justice, Inspector, d'ye see?"

The little man hopped from one leg to the other as he spoke. He declared that he hadn't been a magistrate for twenty years for nothing and assured Biles that in his native Northumberland the Bench was careful to secure that witnesses were not bullied by the police.

The telephone bell rang. Biles closed his note-book and picked up the instrument with a swiftness that was aggressive. He answered the call in sharp monosyllables and then turned to Dr. Hailey.

"I must go now," he declared. "I'll drive you home."

He strode out of the room without any leave-taking. As they left the house he informed the doctor that he had been summoned to Hampstead:

"Where it appears that Mrs. Leyland's cousin, the sculptor, has just lodged information with the police about another case of attempted murder."

CHAPTER VIII

"MORE OF THE DEVIL"

"WHAT do you make of Mrs. Leyland?"

Biles turned towards Dr. Hailey as he spoke and the street lamp showed the doctor his face. Even in the gloom of the cab his face looked threatening.

"Not much, I'm afraid, my dear Biles."

Dr. Hailey grasped the hanging arm-rest with which the vehicle was furnished and slightly raised himself. "Phyllis Leyland impressed me as a woman in deadly fear. As you may have observed, I tried to discover the nature of her fear."

He leaned back again and sighed. He added:

"She is not, I think, afraid for her husband's life. She showed no concern about my opinion of his case though her father pretended that she was deeply anxious. And yet the fact that her husband had threatened to thrash somebody, when I mentioned it, deprived her of speech."

"Obviously, because she fears that her lover made the attack on her husband."

"It may be so." Again Dr. Hailey raised himself. "On the other hand I confess that I had the impression that Phyllis Leyland is in love with her husband." He moved his hand in a gesture which deprecated argument on the subject. "She defended her husband, if you remember, even against her father."

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The cab turned into Langland Gardens and began to mount the steep hill to Frogmal Lane. A moment later it stopped and a policeman opened the door. He saluted Biles with marked deference.

"The Inspector is waiting for you in the studio, sir."

Raoul Featherstone's studio had not been disturbed in any way since Alaister's last visit to it. The Hampstead Inspector recounted the story which Alaister had told him and then indicated the bloodstain on the floor.

"I have only just got here myself," he stated. "So far we have no news of the missing man."

Biles knelt down and examined the bloodstain. He touched it with his finger and then rubbed it. He raised puzzled eyes to the Inspector.

"It seems to have been washed out. Are you sure that it's a recent stain?"

"I don't know, sir."

Biles got up. He saw that Dr. Hailey was wholly immersed in the study of a portrait which stood on one of the easels. He crossed the room and glanced at the portrait.

"Good Heavens, Mrs. Leyland."

"No, I don't think so. But it's extraordinarily like her, isn't it? This girl has, how shall I put it, more of the devil in her face than Phyllis Leyland?" Dr. Hailey adjusted his eyeglass and stood back a few paces from the portrait. "Mr. Raoul Featherstone," he remarked, "seems to be an artist with more talent than genius. This is very bad work, my dear Biles."

The detective did not reply. He walked to the end of the room and stooped down. Dr. Hailey turned to

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see him examining what appeared to be the fragments of a broken walking-stick.

"Doctor, look at this. . . ."

He came back to Dr. Hailey and showed him the handle of the walking-stick. The handle bore a gold band on which were engraved the words: "Lionel from Phyllis," and the address "40y Curzon Street".

"The stick seems to have been broken very recently," Biles remarked in grim tones. "Look how clean the wood is. It was lying against the wall, beside the fireplace, as if it had been flung there when it broke."

Dr. Hailey's face, as he examined the walking-stick, became quite expressionless. He handed the fragments back to Biles and took a pinch of snuff.

"This Raoul Featherstone," he remarked, "seems to be the kind of man who deserves to be thrashed. A sentimentalist, as witness his picture of that girl, and a *bravo*, as witness that rack of knives over the mantelpiece. Men who decorate their rooms with knives are usually unreliable where women are concerned. By the way, one of the knives appears to be missing."

Biles nodded. "So I noticed." He glanced at his watch. "It's half-past five o'clock. I think we can rouse up the sculptor now and hear his story from his own lips. But you might, if you will, before we go, confirm my impression that that bloodstain on the floor has been washed."

CHAPTER IX

A TELEPHONE CALL

KENNEDY informed Inspector Biles that his master was sleeping.

"'E's 'ad a very tiring night, sir, and I scarcely likes to waken 'im."

"You must waken him." Biles presented his card. "Meanwhile we will come in, if you please, and wait until he is ready to see us."

Biles's face looked haggard in the first greyness of the dawn, but his eyes had not lost their gleam of excitement. The butler stood back and held the door open. He showed the unwelcome visitors into Alaister's lounge.

That room appealed instantly and irresistibly to Dr. Hailey, who called the detective's attention to its beauty.

"What a difference between this simplicity and the pretentiousness of Featherstone's studio ! Featherstone has inscribed 'coxcomb' on all his possessions, whereas this man hides himself. Look at that fumed oak screen and those black and white panels."

Dr. Hailey sat down in one of the big leather arm-chairs.

"It looks, my dear Biles," he confessed, "as if your reading of Phyllis Leyland's agitation may be the right one."

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"I have no doubt about it." Biles leaned forward eagerly in his chair. "The girl undoubtedly left home after a serious quarrel with her husband. She knew her husband was determined to assault her lover, and she naturally jumped to the conclusion that her lover had defended himself by attacking her husband. Tell me, is it possible for a man to keep on his feet after receiving such an injury as Lionel Leyland's?"

"Quite possible."

"So that Leyland may have received the blow in Featherstone's studio and then driven home?"

"Yes." Dr. Hailey sighed. "The first effect of a blow on the head," he explained, "is concussion. While that lasts the patient either remains lying down or goes staggering about. But once the concussion has passed away control is restored until the symptoms of compression of the brain begin to make their appearance. Sometimes many hours elapse before compression takes place; it all depends on the severity of the original injury and the amount of actual damage sustained. The compression is caused by leakage of blood from a fractured skull, and consequent formation of clot. Obviously that may be a very quick or a very slow process; it may also be very slight—as in Leyland's case."

Biles nodded.

"If Leyland had a knife in his hand," he remarked, "Featherstone was fully entitled to defend himself."

The door of the room opened. Alaister entered the room. He was in a dressing-gown of some rough material which gave him a shaggy appearance, and his hair was uncombed and straggling. He looked exceedingly ungracious.

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"What do you want?" he demanded gruffly.

Biles cleared his throat before introducing himself and Dr. Hailey.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Mr. Diarmid," he said, "but in a matter of this kind we cannot afford to delay even a single hour."

He paused. Alaister told him to sit down and then demanded :

"I suppose you've read the police reports? If so, you know as much about the business as I know myself. Featherstone was stabbed in the neck. I carried him in here and went back to see if I could find any trace of his assailant. When I returned here with the policeman on the beat he had disappeared."

He strode to the mantelpiece and found his pipe and tobacco. He began to fill his pipe.

"A damned queer story, isn't it?" he remarked. "I'd have bet my bottom dollar the fellow was dead. But he wasn't, apparently."

"He may be dead, may he not?" Biles objected crisply. "You have no proof that he is not dead."

Alaister struck a match and laid it to the bowl of his pipe.

"Only the evidence of my own senses. We searched the house and garden."

"Quite so. But it's possible that the body may have been removed beyond both the house and the garden."

"Removed? Who would remove it?"

"I don't know. Possibly the person who struck the blow."

Alaister shrugged his shoulders. He smoked in silence, with a resentful air. Biles's stream of questions drew from him nothing but a general statement

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that he knew very little about Featherstone and cared less.

Biles put his note-book away and rose.

"What room is that, over there?" he asked, pointing to the door of Alaister's workroom.

"Come and see for yourself."

Alaister opened the door of his workroom and stood back to allow the detective to enter. A sneer curled his lips when Biles lifted one of the dust-sheets from the floor. He took a step forward and, with a gesture which betrayed his irritation at this solemn fuss, pulled away the veil from his statue.

"There, the room's stripped for your inspection," he exclaimed. "I doubt if you could hide a dead rat in it."

"Admirable!"

He turned sharply and saw that Dr. Hailey was gazing at the statue with strained attention. His attitude of hostility relaxed a little and a gleam of pleasure shone in his eyes.

"It's not bad," he declared, "though I say it."

Dr. Hailey allowed his eyeglass to drop from his eye.

"And that," he exclaimed, "is the lady whom Featherstone has painted like the cover of a magazine."

His voice was gentle. Nevertheless, Alaister stiffened at the sound of it.

"So you've seen Featherstone's portrait, have you?" he asked huskily. "My model told me she was sitting for him." He flung the sheet back over the statue and walked into his lounge. "Featherstone's always prating about women, but he can't paint 'em for toffee."

RED SCAR

Biles appeared in the door of the workroom.

"What is the name of your model?" he asked. "If she has been sitting for Featherstone it's just possible that she may know something about his movements."

There was a moment of silence. Then Alaister's pipe clattered on the bricks of the hearth. He stooped down to pick it up.

"Echo Wildermere."

"And her address?"

"Holly Tree Hill, Number three."

Biles returned to the fireplace and sat down. He told Alaister about the assault on Lionel Leyland and about his discovery of the walking-stick in Raoul's studio.

"I know it's a delicate question," he said, "but can you tell me if Leyland had any real reason to be jealous of Featherstone?"

"How the devil should I know?"

Alaister flushed and a heavy scowl gathered on his brow.

"Do you suggest," he sneered, "that it was Lionel who carried Featherstone away from here?"

"Certainly not." Biles's voice crackled like dry leaves. "On the other hand it seems obvious that Major Leyland did give Featherstone a thrashing earlier in the night, and it is just possible that he also wounded him at the same time."

"Rot." Alaister jumped up and towered over the detective. "Lionel Leyland is incapable of drawing a knife on anybody. Incapable, I tell you." He drew his hand across his brow and a vacant look came into his eyes. "I won't deny that he very likely thrashed him," he added. "Lionel lives by a code,

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and thrashing men who meddle with other men's wives is an item in that code of his."

Biles rose and held out his hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Diarmid." He turned to Dr. Hailey.

"I think that before we return to town we ought to call on Miss Wildermere," he remarked.

Alaister accompanied the two men to his gate. Then he strode back to his lounge and snatched up the telephone.

"Is that you, Echo? . . . Look here, old girl, as a favour to me, dress yourself this moment and come down here. . . . No, I can't explain. . . . Don't lose a minute. . . ."

CHAPTER X

A QUESTION OF EVIDENCE

ALAISTER was walking in his garden when Echo arrived. He told her what had happened, and why he had summoned her :

"I couldn't avoid giving them your name," he explained. "To have refused or given a false name would have been asking for it. But I was determined that they shouldn't cross-question you. The Inspector from Scotland Yard seemed harmless enough, but I didn't feel nearly so comfortable about the doctor. . . ."

He was watching Echo as he spoke. He saw a look of bewilderment come into her eyes. She caught at his sleeve.

"What do you mean, Alaister?" she demanded. "Why shouldn't I see these men?"

"Because . . . because there's going to be trouble about this business. . . ."

"That is not what you mean." The girl took a step away from him and faced him. "If you told the truth you would say that you suspect me of having wounded Raoul last night. I know that you suspect me."

He didn't reply for a moment, then he said :

"If you tell me you didn't I shall believe you."

"But not stop taking precautions for my safety?"

Alaister drew a deep breath.

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"My God, girl," he cried, "can't you see how it is? They ask me to believe that Lionel Leyland drew that knife, and I know in my soul that the fellow's incapable, absolutely and utterly incapable, of doing anything of the sort. It's just possible that Phyllis may have come to the studio last night. But no! Phyllis never did it. There's only yourself left. And you . . . were bleeding, battered. . . ." He caught his breath."

"Well?"

"No. I'll leave it at that."

"I didn't wound Raoul."

"Very well, you didn't. Now listen to me. I told the Scotland Yard man that I found Raoul by myself. That I was alone when I found him. I said I was walking in the garden and thought I heard somebody moving about among the bushes. That was my reason for going to the studio. If they question you—and they're bound to question you sooner or later—don't give me the lie by telling them what really happened. You know nothing, absolutely nothing, remember, about Raoul's movements."

Echo flushed and he saw tears start to her eyes.

"It is terrible," she cried, "to be disbelieved as you disbelieve me. To be suspected . . ." She raised her hand in a swift gesture of repudiation. "No, don't try to explain, please. Your statue is enough, by itself, to discount any explanation you can possibly make. That tells what you really think of me."

Alaister frowned but did not speak. He led the way to the house. He filled his pipe and lit it before he attempted to resume the conversation.

"It's a question," he remarked at last, "of evidence. If the police learn that you were with Raoul they'll

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naturally suspect you. I can't endure that you should be suspected."

"Why not?"

"I told you yesterday."

Alaister spoke quietly, without embarrassment, as if he were stating the most commonplace fact. But the girl started at his words.

"If you really cared for me," she cried, "you would trust me."

"It doesn't follow."

He came and stood beside her.

"What I think and what I feel," he said, "are quite different. My brain is always cold."

He spoke earnestly. Echo felt her resentment ebbing away. She was conscious of a wish to convince him that what she had told him was true.

"Why should I wound Raoul?" she asked. "I'm engaged to him."

"I don't know." He hesitated a moment. "What Lionel Leyland told you in this room yesterday must have upset you a great deal, I should imagine. I believe you resent more than most women being made an object of pity. I am putting the case as Scotland Yard might look at it."

Echo flushed and then paled.

"Oh, Raoul told me the truth about Phyl . . . Mrs. Leyland. I know she's your cousin, but I think, all the same, that she's behaved abominably."

The last word was spoken explosively. Alaister's eyes narrowed, but he made no comment. He watched Echo turning her engagement ring round and round on her finger. The diamonds gleamed angrily at each turn. She pulled the ring down nearly to the

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tip of her finger, and then pushed it back again to its place.

"I must go to the studio," she said, "and get my hat and cloak. I forgot about them last night."

"They aren't there." He frowned as he spoke. "They were stained with blood. I got rid of them."

Echo bit her lip. Her eyes moved from his face to the couch on which Raoul had lain.

"I wish I knew what has happened to him," she declared in bitter tones. "This uncertainty is horrible."

They heard the buzz of the front-door bell. Alaister started to his feet.

"Take off your ring," he urged in anxious tones.

"No."

"You shall take it off."

With a swift movement he seized Echo's hand. Before she could prevent him he had removed the ring. He thrust the ring into his pocket and then stood listening. They heard footsteps approaching from the kitchen.

"Kennedy! *Kennedy!*"

"Yes, sir."

Kennedy in his shirt-sleeves entered the room.

"If that should be anybody from the police show him in here, will you?" Alaister ordered. "And . . . put your coat on before you open the door."

CHAPTER XI

THE BLUE STOPPER

"MISS WILDERMERE?"

Dr. Hailey bowed as he asked the question. He stood, filling the doorway, while Kennedy held the door open for him. Then he advanced a few paces into the room.

"I permitted myself to hope," he stated, "that I should find you here."

"You mean that Mrs. Wildermere told you Echo had come here," Alaister broke in.

"No, as it happens Mrs. Wildermere didn't know where Miss Wildermere had gone." The doctor's voice maintained its pleasant tone, though it was evident that he resented Alaister's rudeness. "My information, such as it was, came, as possibly you may recollect, from yourself."

"What?" Alaister thrust his head forward defiantly. "I never told you Miss Wildermere was coming here."

"Of course not. You dropped your pipe, however, when Inspector Biles asked you for her name and address. . . ."

There was a note of asperity now in Dr. Hailey's voice. He turned to Echo.

"I take it that Mr. Diarmid spoke to you on the

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telephone as soon as Inspector Biles and I left this house?"

"Yes."

Alaister indicated a chair and the doctor sat down.

"My reason for telephoning to Miss Wildermere," Alaister said, "was that I knew she would be greatly upset by your visit. I wanted to break the news of what has occurred to her before your friend, Inspector Biles, had an opportunity of distressing her with his questions."

He crammed some tobacco into his pipe and began to light it. He watched the large genial face of Dr. Hailey but could detect nothing of the man's thoughts. A sense of helplessness, which he had not before experienced, assailed him.

"I observe," Dr. Hailey said to Echo, "that you are engaged to be married, Miss Wildermere."

Echo started slightly and glanced at her left hand. She saw the mark on her ring finger, which her new engagement ring had imprinted. She assented.

"And yet you do not wear your engagement ring?"

"It was hurting me."

Dr. Hailey's eyes narrowed. The reply, he recognized, was as adroit as his question.

"You will pardon me," he said, "but I glanced at your hand because it had occurred to me that you might be engaged to Mr. Diarmid."

Alaister flung the lighted match he was holding into the fireplace.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded in tones the exasperation of which he did not even try to disguise.

RED SCAR

Dr. Hailey fixed his eyeglass and turned to face Alaister.

"It occurred to me, as an alternative idea," he stated, "that Miss Wildermere might possibly be engaged to Mr. Raoul Featherstone."

"She is not engaged to Featherstone."

Alaister got up. His hands were clenched, and his hair seemed to bristle. He put up one of his hands and tugged at his collar.

"May I ask what difference it would make anyhow if she was engaged to Featherstone?" he demanded huskily.

The doctor's eyeglass fell. His figure stiffened a little.

"There is no reason," he said, "why I should not be perfectly frank with you. If Miss Wildermere had been engaged to Raoul Featherstone she would necessarily have found herself last night in a very embarrassing position . . . when Major Lionel Leyland thrashed her fiancé for making love to his wife. I conceive, rightly or wrongly, that in such circumstances, a girl of spirit might very easily forget her discretion, or even lose her self-restraint. You have shown in that statue of yours, I think, that Miss Wildermere is emphatically a girl of spirit. . . ."

Dr. Hailey paused. He saw the muscles in Alaister's face grow tense, as if the man was putting forth all his powers of control.

"I see," Alaister cried. He took a step nearer to the doctor and bent over him. "Your reasoning is admirable, excellent. But there is a flaw in it. A fatal flaw. Miss Wildermere, I may as well tell you, is engaged to myself."

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He put his hand into his pocket and took from it Raoul's engagement ring. The diamonds glowed in the light of morning. He came to Echo and put the ring on her finger. He added :

"So you see Miss Wildermere has no cause to feel jealous of Phyllis Leyland or of anybody else."

Dr. Hailey rose. A smile broke on his expansive face. C

"Will you allow me, my dear sir, my dear Miss Wildermere," he requested, "to be among the first to congratulate you?"

When he left Alaister's house Dr. Hailey walked down Frogmal Lane to Langland Gardens. The day was warm for October and he stood a moment to enjoy the lovely colouring of the autumn foliage. No wonder Hampstead people boasted about their gardens and lanes. No wonder generations of artists and poets had made this place their home. He continued his walk slowly ; after a few minutes a look of perplexity came into his eyes. If what he had just heard was true, then either Lionel Leyland or Phyllis had inflicted the wound, and yet, already in his own mind, he had decided against both of them. It was certainly true, as Alaister had pointed out to Biles, that Leyland was a man with a code of honour which forbade the use of the knife in any circumstances. It was not less true that Phyllis lacked those qualities of resolution which Raoul's assailant must almost certainly have possessed. The fact that she and Echo were so like one another indeed revealed the full extent of her weakness by emphasizing it.

The doctor's eyes narrowed. It was strange that Alaister should have himself proclaimed those very traits in Echo's character which now he seemed so

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anxious to discount. His statue told the truth about the girl as only genius can tell the truth. His statue was cast in the primitive mould—woman with her passions glowing in her face. Was it conceivable that such a girl could be Raoul Featherstone's model without becoming personally interested in Raoul Featherstone?

Dr. Hailey reached the studio and was informed by the policeman on duty there that no trace of Featherstone had been found.

"The Inspector," the man said, "told me a few minutes ago that 'e's beginning to doubt Mr. Diarmid's word. If we don't 'ear somethin' pretty soon, 'e told me, orders will be given to dig up Mr. Diarmid's garden."

That prospect seemed to afford the policeman great satisfaction. It was obvious that he had no faith in Alaister's story and was convinced that Raoul had been murdered. Dr. Hailey entered the studio and scrutinized the rack of knives on the wall. All the knives were within easy reach of a woman's hand; the missing knife had been the most conveniently placed of the series. He stood in front of the fireplace, facing the door, and found that in this position he could snatch a knife from the rack without the slightest difficulty.

The knives were of the same pattern: imitation antique, unwhetted. But the points of the long blades were sharp enough. His glance fell to the bloodstain on the floor. Raoul had fallen apparently where he was struck. The blow must have been an exceedingly severe one, therefore, or else the fellow was already in a weak state when he sustained it . . . possibly the result of the thrashing he had

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received. Suppose, however, that this blood was not Raoul's but Lionel Leyland's. Lionel Leyland had very likely fallen when he was struck and the wound in his scalp must have bled freely, at least during the first few minutes. Dr. Hailey scanned the floor with eager eyes. There were no other stains upon it. He raised his eyes to the walls. He strode to the door and focused his eyeglass on the panel immediately adjoining it. Imprinted on the wood-work were the marks of bloody fingers, outspread, as if seeking support.

So Lionel Leyland had not fallen. With those imprints before one it was possible to see Leyland pressing his hand to his head and staggering towards the door, and then stretching out his hands to save himself from collapse.

It could be said with absolute assurance that, after he received the blow on his head, Leyland was incapable of wounding anybody.

It could also be said that Raoul Featherstone, after he was wounded, was incapable of striking the blow which Leyland had received. Raoul had been wounded therefore after Leyland went away. The doctor walked to the fireplace and picked up the poker. He held the point of the poker up, close under one of the electric lamps. Adhering to the point of the poker were a number of small hairs, clotted together with blood.

Dr. Hailey laid the poker back in its place and turned his attention to the bloodstains on the floor. He had no doubt now that this was Raoul's blood; nor could there be any doubt that an effort had been made to wash the stain away. Was this attempt to remove the traces of blood the real reason for Alaister's

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return to the studio after he had carried Raoul over to his own house ? But in that case Alaister must have intended at first to offer an explanation of the tragedy different from the explanation which, in the end, he had offered. The explanation which he had offered required no washing away of the bloodstains.

The doctor took a pinch of snuff. There were only two possible reasons why Alaister should wish to hide the fact that Raoul had been wounded ; he might, himself, have inflicted the wound or he might have known that someone, whom he desired to shield, had inflicted the wound. His behaviour about Echo pointed to the latter as being the true reason, unless, indeed, Echo had been a mere witness of the attack on Raoul. One thing seemed clear : neither Alaister nor Echo had been present when Lionel Leyland thrashed Raoul, for had either of them been present Leyland would scarcely have been allowed to go staggering, unsupported, across the room after Raoul struck him, as the imprint of his bloody fingers on the panelling showed that he had done.

Dr. Hailey started slightly. There was Phyllis Leyland also to be fitted into the picture. Since she knew that her husband was going to thrash Raoul she had, in all probability, visited her lover either to warn him or to protect him. Suppose that she had come after her husband went away and had found Echo in the study with Raoul. A woman whose nerves were so fiercely wrought upon as Phyllis's nerves must have been, would be greatly tempted, in such circumstances, to expose her faithless lover to the woman whom, as she might suspect, had turned his head. . . . And women always believe one another about these matters. . . .

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Dr. Hailey bent forward suddenly with his eyes fixed on the floor a few paces from the place where he was standing. He walked towards the object which had attracted his attention and picked it up.

It was a stopper made of that deep blue glass which is always used for poison bottles.

CHAPTER XII

A TONIC

THE stopper was broken.

Dr. Hailey glanced about him to see if he could find the piece which had been broken off. After a few minutes he discovered it, lying against the wall opposite the fireplace. He fitted the one bit of glass to the other. The stopper evidently had been thrown down forcibly on the floor and smashed. The smaller fragment had travelled farther than the larger fragment.

He made a careful search of the room but could not discover the bottle to which the stopper belonged. The stopper was a large size, much larger than those fitted to linament bottles or bottles of antiseptics. What had Raoul been doing with so much poison? And where had the poison disappeared to?

Dr. Hailey put the fragments of glass into his pocket. He glanced at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He left the studio and walked down to Finchley Road. He got a cab there and told the driver to take him to 40y Curzon Street. Dudley Titling received him at the door of the house and conducted him into Lionel Leyland's study.

"Doctor says things are goin' on as well as can be expected," the little man declared. "He's out of danger now and all that sort of thing. Poor Phyllis though's

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played out. Man from Scotland Yard damned rude to her, don't you think?"

"He has his duty to perform, I'm afraid."

Dr. Hailey's tones were unenthusiastic. Dudley Titling, however, did not seem to notice that fact. He was smoking a cigarette and had wetted the end of it so that it would no longer draw. He flung it testily into the fireplace.

"Can't help feelin' sorry," he stated, "that Phyllis didn't tell the detective everything. Should have told him everything myself because, d'ye see, nothing whatever to hide. Nothing. Absolutely." He adopted a confidential air. "Fact is, my dear Hailey, Lionel's victim of delusions. Most shockin', d'ye see. Got idea in his head Phyllis's in love with an artist . . . man called Featherstone. Between you and me, haystack and all that sort of thing, Featherstone's fella' Lionel promised to thrash."

He rubbed his small hands together but without cheerfulness.

"Phyllis came to me. . . . Spent the whole evening together, yet never a word about what had happened. Only heard the truth when this affair began. Phyllis's soul of loyalty, d'ye see. Won't hear a syllable against Lionel."

Dr. Hailey had made no sign when Raoul Featherstone's name was mentioned. He decided not to tell Dudley Titling about the events at Hampstead, because Biles had spoken of the importance of keeping the news out of the papers until the police had completed their investigations.

"Do you suppose," he asked, "that Major Leyland fulfilled his threat to thrash this man Featherstone? . . ."

"Not a doubt . . . Lionel's the kind of fella'

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always fulfils his threats. Man with a ramrod plum through his soul." Titling opened his cigarette-case with a jerk and spilled its contents. He hopped about the floor collecting the cigarettes. "Between ourselves, can't help thinkin' Lionel may have got his wound from Featherstone. Remember a fella' at Aldershot once who walked ten miles with a cracked skull. . . ."

Dr. Hailey took a pinch of snuff.

"Mrs. Leyland didn't communicate with Featherstone, did she, during the evening?" he inquired. "I mean, to warn him of his danger."

"May have done. Didn't tell me anything about it. Telephone in every room in my house. Poor Phyllis terribly cut up; went to bed after dinner. Nine o'clock."

Dudley Titling shut his cigarette-case and crammed it into his pocket. He snatched a big silk handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at his brow. "Nothing between Phyllis and Featherstone. Nothing. Absolutely. Met him somewhere, dance, that sort of thing."

He broke off. The suggestion of impishness which his features usually conveyed was wholly lost. Anxiety rolled in his eyes. Dr. Hailey left him and ascended the stairs to Lionel Leyland's bedroom. Dr. Lomond had gone away but the nurse was still on duty. She reported that her patient had been sleeping peacefully for several hours.

"What about his breathing?" the doctor asked.

"Like a child. Quiet and regular."

"In that case he'll probably recover consciousness almost immediately. I should like to be informed when he recovers consciousness."

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Dr. Hailey felt the patient's pulse and then laid his hand on his brow.

"Keep a sharp look out," he warned, "because once consciousness returns he will be apt to be troublesome. These cases pass through a kind of twilight stage in which almost anything may happen."

He quitted the room and descended the stairs. Dudley Titling had seated himself in an arm-chair and seemed to be greatly exhausted. He scarcely troubled to inquire how the doctor had found his patient.

"Feel devilish queer, Hailey," he said. "Swimming about the head and that sort of thing. Been told I've got a heart and begin to believe it. Old man Anderson said I might drop in my tracks one of these days. . . ." He grinned uneasily. . . . "Suppose you couldn't suggest some sort of a pick-me-up? . . ."

Dr. Hailey felt the little man's pulse. It was rather weak but quite regular. . . .

"I'll give you a tonic if you like," he said. "I can call at a chemist's now and tell him to send it to you?"

"Oh, no. If you leave the prescription I'll send out for it." Dudley Titling indicated the writing-table with a jerk of his arm. "You'll find notepaper in one of the drawers."

Dr. Hailey sat down at the table. He unscrewed the cap of his fountain-pen and laid the pen on the desk in front of him. Then he opened the top drawer. . .

His hand, which was stretched out to take a sheet of notepaper, stiffened. Then the fingers tightened on the palm. Lying in the drawer, on the top of the pile of notepaper which almost filled it, was a knife of the same pattern as the knives in Raoul Featherstone's studio.

RED SCAR

Dr. Hailey glanced over his shoulder at Dudley Titling. The little man seemed to be absorbed in his own troubles and was not looking at him. He lifted the knife out of the drawer with a quick gesture and laid it on the desk in front of him.

The long blade was heavily stained. He glanced at the paper on which it had been lying. There was no stain on the paper. He examined the stain with his glass and then hurriedly slipped the knife back in the drawer.

He turned again. Dudley Titling was leaning forward in his chair gazing at him with strained attention. He wrote his prescription and checked each item of it with his usual care. Then he folded it and placed it in an envelope. He sealed the envelope and pressed the gummed edge down firmly.

He rose from the desk and handed his prescription to Dudley Titling.

"Is your daughter in the house?" he asked.

"She's sleepin', I believe."

"I'm particularly anxious to speak to her. With your consent I shall ring and ask her maid to find out if she is really asleep."

Dr. Hailey spoke in gentle tones, but something in his tones seemed, nevertheless, to alarm his companion.

"My dear Hailey," the little man cried, "do please have mercy on poor Phyllis. This shockin' strains enough to unhinge her mind. Must get rest, d'ye see."

The doctor thought a moment. Then he said:

"I have some reason to think that your daughter's relations with this artist, Featherstone, may have been more intimate than you suppose. I mean . . ."

He took a quick step forward and caught Dudley

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Titling by the shoulders just as the little man was about to fall out of his chair. He supported him for a moment and then laid him back in the chair. He took a small bottle of smelling salts from his pocket and held the bottle under the little man's nose.

Dudley Titling breathed deeply but the dusky hue of his cheeks remained uninfluenced by this effort. His head had sunk down on his chest ; it rolled a little to one side. A look of alarm appeared on Dr. Hailey's face. In just this fashion, as he knew, the victims of certain diseases of the heart often end their lives.

But the faintness passed as quickly as it had come. Dudley Titling opened his eyes and gazed vacantly about him. . . .

"I feel terribly ill. . . ."

His body stiffened and then relaxed again. His breathing became normal and he regained a little of his habitual alertness.

"Another of my beastly attacks, eh?" he remarked.

Dr. Hailey took his stethoscope from his pocket and listened to his heart. Then he put the stethoscope away again.

"Rest for a few minutes," he ordered in tones which were grave in spite of his desire to make them reassuring.

Dudley Titling, however, sat up in the chair. He rubbed his small neat hands together.

"It's nothing . . . nothing," he muttered. "Or else it's a devilish deal. Goodness knows which, and anyhow what's it matter? . . . Only got Phyllis to think about now." He put out his hand suddenly and caught at Dr. Hailey's arm. He raised his queer wizened little face to the man who had been his schoolfellow.

RED SCAR

"Hailey, old man," he exclaimed. "I want to tell you . . . about Phyllis. . . . What she's been to me . . . meant to me . . . all that sort of thing. . . . And I can't. . . . Can't, d'ye see." He caught his breath in a kind of sob that was also a kind of laugh. "Never could talk that sort of stuff. Always wanted to. Damned hard luck, don't you think?"

The doctor did not reply. He lowered his gaze that he might not see the tears in Dudley Titling's eyes. He told himself that everyone tends to be emotional after a fainting attack, and then that this man had been fore-ordained to sentimentalize over son or daughter. But there had been a quality in Dudley Titling's voice, nevertheless, when he spoke about Phyllis, which had thrilled him. For an instant the fact that he himself was childless rose stark in Dr. Hailey's mind.

He put the thought away and screwed his eyeglass into his eye.

"You must not suppose," he said gently, "that I am trying in any way to attach blame to your daughter. I am quite sure that, were she here, she would set any doubts I may entertain finally at rest. . . ."

A step sounded behind him. He turned to see Phyllis approaching from the doorway.

CHAPTER XIII

"LIKE VERMIN"

PHYLLIS was dressed in a white knitted coat which accentuated, in some indefinable way, her gentleness and her weakness. Her eyes looked suspiciously red but she smiled, nevertheless, when she greeted Dr. Hailey.

"Well?" she asked.

"Better. Much better. He will very soon be fighting his nurse to get out of bed and go for a walk. At least I think so."

"I'm so glad."

Phyllis sat down on the big padded fender. She passed her hand across her brow in a gesture of weariness. The doctor had a swift impression that she wished to ask if his detective work had yielded any result but did not dare to ask him. He volunteered the information that the police had a theory about the crime to which her husband had fallen a victim. . . .

"They think that he may have been struck before he returned home. . . ."

The girl did not reply; she kept clasping her hands together and unclasping them. She had her handkerchief in her hands and it was compressed into a tiny ball.

"I didn't tell the detective the whole truth about Lionel's . . . about my husband's jealousy," she

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blurted out at last. "Lionel had real cause to be jealous. . . ."

"Nonsense. . . . Nonsense. . . ." Dudley Titling had half-risen from his chair. The dusky colour was returning to his face. Dr. Hailey made a sign to Phyllis to desist. But the girl was too overwrought to observe it.

"I think," the doctor said, "that when trouble comes we are all, if we are averagely decent folk, apt to exaggerate any faults we may have committed. Perhaps most of us are inclined to attach too much importance to our own share in anything which happens around us. . . ."

He took out his snuff-box. He saw that Dudley Titling's muscles had relaxed again, and that the little man was breathing easily once more.

"My own experience," he added, speaking to Phyllis, "has been that it is never very wise to indulge in confessions."

"I am not indulging in a confession. I only wish you to know that Lionel had cause to be jealous. Until . . . until yesterday . . . I thought I was in love with . . . somebody else. I told Lionel I was going to leave him. . . ."

She broke off. She rose to her feet.

"So if Lionel did use violence," she added, "he had provocation . . . great provocation."

Phyllis's face was flushed and her big blue eyes gleamed softly. Dr. Hailey felt an impulse to assure her that she had no cause for anxiety. Then the picture of the bloodstained knife lying in the drawer behind him rose in his mind. He glanced again at Dudley Titling. To his surprise the impish little face had recovered some of its native sprightliness.

"LIKE VERMIN"

"I also," Dudley Titling said, "have a confession to make. To you, Hailey, not to the policeman, d'ye see. Fact is I visited Lionel myself last night . . . minute or two before midnight. . . . Felt a bit frightened, d'ye see. Phyllis leavin' her home and that sort of thing . . . knowin' Lionel had heat-stroke, 'India, and that sort of thing. Light in Lionel's window when I got to the door. Knocked on the window. Lionel opened the door. . . ."

He broke off. He wriggled forward in his chair.

"Lionel shockin' state of excitement. . . . Eyes rollin' . . . face twitchin' . . . grindin' his teeth too . . . shouted out: 'Damn you, what d'ye want, you little devil.' Walked away from me into this room. . . . Walked up and down mutterin' . . . 'Featherstone's a murderer. . . .' Stopped. Pressed his hands to his head. Glared at me with his rollin' eyes. . . . 'Man who steals another man's wife is a murderer. Ought to be killed like vermin. . . . Duty of every decent man to kill him.' Caught my shoulders after he said that and shook me. Kept on saying . . . 'Ought to be killed like vermin,' as if I was disagreein' with him. . . . Phyllis dear, what's wrong . . . ?"

The little man jumped to his feet and came to his daughter's side. Phyllis had grown very pale. He put his arm round her shoulders. . . .

"I'm so sorry . . ." he exclaimed, "but it's all right now, dear. Only the blow on his head, of course. Didn't know what he was saying."

Phyllis covered her face with her hands and remained for a few moments bent forward, while her father

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continued to administer comfort to her. Then she began to weep bitterly.

There was a knock at the door. Lionel Leyland's nurse entered the room.

"Please, doctor," she said, "will you come upstairs again. Major Leyland is conscious now."

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUESTIONS OF DR. HAILEY

DR. HAILEY mounted the stairs slowly. He stopped half-way up the stairs and stood a moment with his eyes fixed vacantly on the big stained-glass window which lighted the staircase. The police, he remembered, had entered the house and discovered Lionel Leyland because the front door of the house was standing ajar. Was it Dudley Titling who had left the door open? If so, then the little man must have gone away in a great hurry, and as silently as possible. That suggested that Leyland had collapsed while Dudley Titling was with him. It suggested, too, a sense of guilt in Dudley Titling's mind. A man, especially a father-in-law, whose conscience was clear would certainly, in such circumstances, have summoned a doctor and roused the household. . . .

Why had the little man left his son-in-law to his fate? Why had he come, at that late hour, to his son-in-law's house?

The doctor resumed his ascent of the stairs. As he opened the door of the sick-room Lionel Leyland sat up in bed. The next moment he jumped out of bed. He stood glaring at the doctor, with clenched fists and expanded nostrils.

"Who are you?"

Dr. Hailey walked to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

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"Get back to bed, there's a good fellow," he said. "You've been ill, you know."

Leyland's eyes became vacant as though he was trying to remember something. He allowed himself to be conducted back to bed. But he refused to lie down in the bed. His hands moved restlessly over the counterpane.

"I'm going to thrash you," he muttered between his clenched teeth, "to ribbons. . . ."

He leaned forward and raised his right arm. His breath hissed. Then he became limp and fell back on the pillows. Dr. Hailey sat down beside him and put his hand on his brow.

"Please don't talk. . . ."

Leyland closed his eyes. But he opened them again a moment later. He asked where he was. Then he mentioned Raoul Featherstone's name.

"I shall give him a thrashing," he declared, "as soon as I can walk." Again he sat up. "You are a doctor, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Listen. I had a wife once whom I loved. She was a good girl, very gentle and very kind. But a man stole her from me." Leyland nodded his head slowly, with emphasis. "He stole her by pretending that he needed her more than I needed her. She told me she was going to leave me, to go to him. I consented to let her go."

He raised his head and faced the doctor.

"Then I met a girl in Hampstead who said she was engaged to be married to the man who had stolen my wife."

Leyland's eyes began to stare again. He grasped Dr. Hailey's wrist.

THE QUESTIONS OF DR. HAILEY

"I told Echo Wildermere the truth about Raoul Featherstone," he cried, "though Alaister tried to prevent me from telling her. And when I got home I told Phyllis the truth. . . ."

The door of the room opened. Phyllis entered the room and came silently to her husband's side. She spoke his name in trembling accents. At the sound of her voice Lionel Leyland started violently. He turned towards her :

"Go away," he cried. "Go away before I hurt you. . . ."

"Please Lionel, forgive me. . . ." The girl stretched out her hands in what seemed to be an agony of remorse. . . .

"Go away. . . . Go to your lover, or go to the devil. . . ." Leyland caught his breath. "My God, if you don't go away I'll kill you."

He clutched at the bedclothes and struggled to rise, but Dr. Hailey held him in a strong grasp. The nurse came between Phyllis and her husband, and then led Phyllis out of the room. When the door closed behind his wife Leyland's head sank on his breast. . . .

"Horrible . . . horrible," he moaned.

His hands still clutched the sheets ; his knuckles, Dr. Hailey observed, were blanched. In this mood he was certainly capable of anything. The doctor deliberated whether or not to ask him if he knew how he had been wounded. He decided not to ask him. It was obvious that Leyland's mind was still engaged with the events which had preceded his visit to Raoul Featherstone's studio. As so often happened to the victims of head injuries, the circumstances in which the injury had been sustained were blotted out of his memory.

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Dr. Hailey waited until his patient had calmed down sufficiently to consent to take a sleeping draught. Then he left the house and called a cab. He told the driver to take him back to Hampstead. When the vehicle started he lay back and closed his eyes.

The cab stopped at the end of the private road leading to Alaister's gate. Dr. Hailey paid the driver and then walked slowly towards the gate.

Kennedy opened the door in answer to his ring. He announced that his master was busy casting a statue and could not see anybody until that operation was complete. . . .

"Tell him, will you, that I will wait for him in the garden. . . ."

The doctor turned away from the door. At the same moment Alaister came out of his lounge into the little hall.

"Come in," he cried, "I'm practically finished."

Alaister wore a big apron which was plentifully splashed with plaster of paris. His hair was also splashed with plaster, as if he had thrust his hand through it while engaged on his task. He led Dr. Hailey into his lounge and told him to sit down. Then he went into his workroom and shut the door. He emerged from the workroom a few minutes later and again closed the door. He was no longer wearing his apron.

"Well," he demanded ungraciously, "have you found Featherstone?"

Dr. Hailey shook his head. He had come to probe further Alaister's relations with Echo Wildermere, and he was considering how best to approach that subject.

"I have reason to believe," he said, at last, "that

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your cousin, Phyllis Leyland, visited Featherstone's studio last night."

He watched Alaister intently as he spoke. He was deliberately holding out to Alaister a chance to escape from the belief that Echo had wounded Raoul Featherstone—a belief which he felt sure that Alaister entertained. He saw the young sculptor start slightly, and detected a gleam of excitement in his eyes. But the excitement lasted only for an instant.

"If you mean by that," Alaister declared, "that my cousin Phyllis may have wounded Featherstone, I can assure you that you are mistaken." Alaister took a step towards the doctor. "Good God, man," he cried, "you've met my cousin, haven't you? Can't you see for yourself that she's wholly and utterly incapable of wounding anything on earth. . .?"

He broke off suddenly as if he felt that he had said too much. His features became set in a scowl which, however, was unconvincing. Dr. Hailey made a mental note of the tone of appeal in which he had repudiated the idea of Phyllis's guilt. In spite of himself Alaister had proclaimed the fact that he would fain believe that Phyllis was guilty.

"Timid people," the doctor said, "often become very bold, you know, if they are driven to desperation."

He spoke slowly and earnestly, dangling the bait before Alaister's eyes. But the sculptor swept it away from him. . . .

"Not Phyllis . . . Phyllis can be bold morally. She can be bold in hurting herself for her conscience's sake. But not physically. I know her."

"Every woman in the world can be bold physically when her emotional life is threatened. There is no exception."

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The doctor watched again for even the slightest sign of relief on the part of his companion. There was no sign. Alaister, it was certain, believed that Echo Wildermere had struck the blow. He must, Dr. Hailey concluded, have good, even overwhelming, reasons for his belief, for nothing but the strongest reasons could sustain, in a mind such as his, ideas against which clearly every instinct of his being revolted. Had he actually seen Echo then with the knife in her hand? The doctor deliberated a moment and then told him what Lionel Leyland had said about Echo's engagement to Raoul Featherstone. He added:

"Leyland declared that you tried to prevent him from telling Miss Wildermere about Featherstone's relations with his wife."

Alaister had risen and seemed to be groping on the mantelpiece for matches to light his pipe, which he had placed bowl downwards in his mouth.

"By your own showing Leyland is delirious," he growled. "What's the use of bothering about anything he may say?"

"Even a delirious man would scarcely invent a story of that kind, I think. I'm puzzled. If what Leyland has told me is true then you did your best to prevent Miss Wildermere from hearing anything against Featherstone. And yet you say that Miss Wildermere is engaged to yourself. Why, if she is engaged to you, should you care what she hears about this other man?"

Alaister did not reply. He lit his pipe and surrounded himself with smoke. The doctor finished polishing his eyeglass and set it in his eye.

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"My own reading of the case is that Miss Wildermere is not engaged to you. She is engaged to Featherstone. But you are in love with her. That, if I may say so, is the only theory which fits the facts. Love in this case, however, is clearly not blind."

There was a menacing ring in the last words which caused Alaister's jaws to tighten.

"I don't follow you," he snarled.

"I shall explain myself. Yesterday, apparently, you received a visit from Lionel Leyland who came to tell you that his wife, your cousin Phyllis, was in love with Raoul Featherstone, and was threatening to leave home and go to live with that young man. While Leyland was here with you Miss Wildermere called and told you that she was engaged to Featherstone."

"For God's sake spare me the repetition of all that." Alaister threw himself down in an arm-chair, and then immediately grasped the arms of the chair and raised himself again. . . . "What the devil has all that to do with Raoul's wound?" he demanded.

"This," Dr. Hailey's eyes flashed: "that Miss Wildermere left your house with the knowledge that her fiancé was a scoundrel, and that the same knowledge was conveyed, a little later, to your cousin Phyllis. Both Miss Wildermere and Mrs. Leyland had good reason to hate Raoul Featherstone." The doctor held up his hand to prevent Alaister from interrupting him. "Let me have my say, please. Mrs. Leyland visited Featherstone's studio last night. Miss Wildermere also visited Featherstone's studio last night. . . ."

"No!"

Alaister shouted the word. His eyes, the doctor saw,

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were glaring. His fingers seemed to dig into the soft leather with which the chair he was sitting in was covered. Dr. Hailey allowed his eyeglass to drop from his eye. . . .

"We are not," he said, "in a police office. These are my own opinions and deductions. Have the courtesy to allow me to finish. . . ."

"You are working for the police."

"In a sense, yes. I have not yet, however, put my views before them. I wish, before I do that, to test my views in every possible way, and I dared to hope that you would help me to test them . . . by listening to them."

Alaister's scowl deepened.

"Echo did not visit Raoul Featherstone last night," he declared. "Please get that fact firmly in your mind."

"Indeed. Then why, may I ask, did you trouble yourself to wash out the bloodstain in Featherstone's studio?"

Dr. Hailey launched his question very quietly but the effect of it was as great as if he had shouted. Alaister started and his whole body seemed to grow stiff. Then with a supreme effort he mastered himself. He forced a laugh.

"Here's another question to match your question," he cried. "Why did I tell the police that Featherstone was lying wounded in my house if I had anything to hide? Why did I actually bring the police to my house?"

"Because the police discovered you in Featherstone's studio."

"Good God, what a reason. Do you really rate my powers of invention so low as to suppose that I couldn't have told them some tale to cover my presence?"

THE QUESTIONS OF DR. HAILEY

I've known Featherstone for years. We've been constantly in one another's studios."

Alaister's voice rang out as he spoke, and the fact that the doctor looked slightly nonplussed increased his confidence. . . .

"There," he added, "is one point at any rate to set against the views you seem to have formed. It is true of scientific work, isn't it, that a single exception disproves the rule?"

Dr. Hailey thought a moment.

"I have asked myself your question already," he declared, "and I have answered it in this way: When the police found you in Featherstone's studio you were alone. But when you made the discovery that Featherstone had been wounded you were not alone. It must have occurred to you at once that your actions during the last hour or so had possibly been kept under observation. The safest course, in the circumstances, was to be quite frank."

"What!" Alaister started up again . . . "Bring the police on the scene of action before I had time even to dispose of the evidence of my guilt? . . ." He stopped suddenly and laughed again. "But, of course, you think that I *had* disposed of the evidence of my guilt. Featherstone's body was no longer in my room. . . ."

His lips were curled now in a sneer. Dr. Hailey had a swift impression of a tension which was nearing the breaking-point.

"I have not," he said, "been speaking of your guilt." He moved in his seat, and for a moment seemed to hesitate. "My interest, you see, is fixed not on yourself but on Miss Wildermere."

CHAPTER XV

MY TEMPER AGAIN

ALAISTER emptied his pipe into a big metal ash-tray which stood on the table beside him. His pipe rattled on the edge of the tray.

"Thank God," he declared fervently, "I was able to rescue poor Echo from your clutches this morning. I told her that the fact that she had been Featherstone's model would be quite enough to convince you that she had murdered him."

Dr. Hailey rose to his feet.

"My difficulty," he declared, "is not that I may suspect Miss Wildermere but that you do actually suspect her."

He turned on his heel. The next moment Alaister, pale with fury, stood beside him.

"That is a lie."

Alaister grasped the doctor's arm. The two men faced one another. Dr. Hailey's colour heightened.

"When," he said, "I have placed the fact of your telephone call to Miss Wildermere this morning before the police I fancy that they will arrive at the conclusion at which I have arrived . . . with the additional evidence of the washed-out bloodstains before them. . . . Hands off, sir."

Dr. Hailey sprang back and put up his arms to defend himself. But the action was taken a moment

MY TEMPER AGAIN

too late. Alaister's hand shot out and the doctor felt himself seized by the throat. His head was forced back and he saw Alaister's eyes glaring at him.

"I'll put it out of your power, damn you, to tell the police anything," Alaister shouted.

His grasp tightened. Dr. Hailey thrust out his right foot and at the same moment flung himself backwards away from the sculptor. The two men went crashing against the door of the room.

Alaister's grasp relaxed. He staggered. Dr. Hailey closed with him and forced him to his knees. But as he did so he saw that the fury in the man's eyes was extinguished. Alaister looked bewildered and distressed. The doctor was about to release him when the door of the room, against which they had fallen, was pushed open. A woman's scream shrilled in the silence.

Next moment the doctor felt himself seized from behind and flung backwards away from his antagonist. The assault was so violent and unexpected that he fell heavily on the carpet. When he picked himself up Kennedy, the butler, was helping his master to rise.

Alaister still looked bewildered. He passed his hand uneasily across his brow several times. Then he waved his servant away and turned to Dr. Hailey.

"Forgive me. My nerves are rotten. . . ."

A bitter smile broke on his lips.

"Kennedy. . . ."

"Yes, sir. . . ."

The butler returned from the door.

"Was that Lolotte who screamed? . . ."

"Yes, sir. . . ."

"Tell her to come here. . . . I want her . . . and come back yourself. . . ."

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Alaister approached the doctor. . . .

"I'm damned sorry," he declared, "but you wound me up too high. I break when I'm wound up too high."

Dr. Hailey shrugged his shoulders. Kennedy had returned to the room with his daughter. Alaister seated himself on the arm of one of his leather chairs.

"I want you to tell this gentleman, Kennedy, about the quarrel I had here two nights ago with Mr. Raoul Featherstone," he said.

The butler's expressionless face reddened slightly. He glanced from his master to the doctor and back again. . . .

"Begging your pardon, sir. . . ."

"I mean it. . . . Tell him exactly what happened. . . ."

"I am not aware, sir, of what 'appened, exactly. . . ."

"Good Heavens, you know what you did yourself, anyhow. . . ."

"Yes, sir, on your orders, sir, I turned Mr. Featherstone out of the 'ouse." Kennedy addressed himself to Dr. Hailey. "Mr. Featherstone called 'ere the night before last," he stated, "and the 'ouse bein' small I 'eard 'igh words between 'im and the master. Then I 'eard a crash, same as I 'eard a few minutes ago. I ran to the door of this room fearin' that something might be amiss ; there bein' no sound I went back to my kitchen, when the master 'ere rang 'is bell. . . ."

Kennedy paused and cleared his throat. Hesitation had gripped him.

"Go on . . . Go on . . ." cried Alaister. "Tell him what you saw when you answered the bell. . . ."

"Mr. Featherstone, sir. I saw Mr. Featherstone lying on the floor wiv 'is mouth bleedin'. The master

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'e says to me, 'Kennedy,' 'e says, 'ave the goodness to kick this fellow out o' my 'ouse,' 'e says. Mr. Featherstone 'e jumps up at that and runs out o' the 'ouse 'isself. . . ."

Kennedy nodded his head twice when he finished his story. It was apparent that the recital had afforded him a thrill of joy. Alaister swung round towards Lolotte. . . .

"Did you hear anything?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Dr. Hailey what you heard."

Lolotte looked frightened. She had grown rather pale and the copper colour of her hair accentuated her pallor. . . .

"I . . . I heard quarrelling," she stammered.

"What about? What about? Surely we shouted loud enough for the dead to hear us."

"About Echo . . . Miss Wildermere. . . ."

"Ha!" Alaister crossed his legs and swung heavily back into the chair. . . . "What were we saying about Miss Wildermere, eh?"

"I . . . I couldn't hear exactly. . . ."

"Nonsense. . . ."

Lolotte caught her breath. . . .

"It's the truth, sir; I couldn't hear exactly. I . . . I thought . . ." she broke off. Her hand clutched at her father's arm and she seemed to stumble.

"Well?"

"I thought that I heard you tell him you would . . . you would kill him like a dog. . . ."

"Quite right. I said that. I meant it, too." Alaister dismissed his servants and turned to Dr. Hailey. . . . "You heard them? It's the truth. Featherstone came here two nights ago and made

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some remarks about Echo which I resented—nothing much—but from him damned intolerable. I hit him on the mouth. Told him if he ever dared to mention her again I'd kill him."

He broke off. He rose and came across the room to the doctor.

"Last night," he said, "I began to feel I had been a bit rough on him. My damned temper again. So I went over to his studio. He's an unforgiving brute and he repeated his offence. . . . Then I stuck the knife in his neck." ,

CHAPTER XVI

A STAMPED RECEIPT

ALAISTER began to fill his pipe and Dr. Hailey noticed that his hands were now steady. The tension which had so greatly distressed him was resolved. The doctor sat down, but offered no comment.

"So now you understand," the sculptor said, "why I was anxious to keep Miss Wildermere out of this business. She knew about the quarrel and must have told what she knew had she been questioned. No man puts his head in a noose if he can help it."

"Haven't you just put your head in a noose?"

Alaister raised his head sharply.

"As you said, I'm in love with Echo," he stated, "and you've been accusing her. You've got me." He lit his pipe. "I had meant, after I had washed out the bloodstain, to take Featherstone in a cab to the Hampstead General Hospital and tell them I had found him lying in Frogal Lane. The arrival of the police scuppered that plan. You've scuppered the plan I made after the police arrived—to keep my own and everybody else's mouths shut. You've forced me to tell you the truth."

Dr. Hailey rose. He stood a moment considering what he ought to say. Then he walked to the door. He opened the door.

"I think you had better understand," he stated,

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"that I do not believe what you have just told me."

He passed through the door and closed it behind him. Then he opened the front door and strode away from the house. He drove straight back to Harley Street. When he reached Harley Street he rang up Biles at Scotland Yard, and asked whether or not there was any news of Featherstone.

"Not a syllable." Biles added: "If we hear nothing before to-morrow morning, I'm going to have the sculptor's garden dug. Frankly, I don't believe his story."

"You haven't circulated a description to the newspapers?"

"No. Don't intend to, either. Not, anyhow, till the Leylands' share in the business has been cleared up. Haven't heard, have they, about the discovery at Hampstead?"

"No."

Dr. Hailey told the detective that Lionel Leyland had recovered consciousness. Then he had a bath and was shaved by his man Jenkins.

"What would you do, Jenkins," he asked, "if you suddenly found yourself with a dead body on your hands and an hour to spare in which to get rid of it?"

Jenkins shook his head. "Dunno, sir. But I knows I wouldn't bury it. Every time I 'ears of a murder with the body missin' I says to myself: 'They'll be diggin' to-morrow,' and sure enough, they are. You remember that young fella' wot buried 'is sweet-heart on 'is poultry farm. . . ."

"What about lifting a plank in the floor?"

"Might do for a bit. . . . Police 'as quick eyes for that sort of thing. . . ."

Jenkins finished his work and the doctor went down

A STAMPED RECEIPT

to luncheon. He spent the afternoon visiting patients. During the afternoon he stopped his car at a public call-office and rang up the Hampstead police. He spoke to the Inspector whom he had met with Biles in the morning, and asked that Raoul's garden might be carefully searched for a blue glass bottle.

"A big bottle—such as doctors use to keep their stocks of poisonous drugs in."

After dinner Dr. Hailey drove up to Hampstead again. He was tired but his brain refused to relinquish the problem which he had set it. The jolting of the somewhat ancient taxicab in which he was seated served as a fresh stimulant of his thoughts. The policeman on duty in the studio, a different man from the one he had met earlier in the day, told him that no bottle had been found in the garden. But a blood-stained pillow had been found in Raoul's bed, upstairs.

"And we found this, sir, in the pocket of one of Mr. Featherstone's lounge suits."

Dr. Hailey took the folded slip of paper which the constable offered to him. He opened it. It was a stamped receipt from the Goldsmith's Company in Regent Street for an engagement ring set with diamonds. The receipt bore the date of the previous day.

CHAPTER XVII

FOOTSTEPS

So Alaister had lied when he stated that Echo was engaged to him and not Raoul, and when he pretended that the diamond engagement ring had been bought by himself.

Dr. Hailey handed the receipt back to the policeman. He took a piece of chalk from his pocket and made a mark with it on the floor at the spot where he had picked up the glass stopper. He measured the distance between this spot and the bloodstain and found that it was five yards. He now marked the spot where he had found the smaller fragment of the stopper and then drew a line on the floor from the bloodstain to this last spot. The line passed close to the spot where the larger fragment of the stopper had been found.

In all probability, then, the stopper had been flung by someone standing near the bloodstain. It had been flung, too, with a good deal of violence, for the glass was thick, of a quality which is not easily broken. Dr. Hailey stood up and contracted his brow. Had the thing been used as a missile? But in that case the person at whom it had been thrown must have been lying on the ground, for the stopper had certainly been thrown downwards. The doctor knelt and examined the floor with his eyeglass. He could detect on the dusty boards no sign of anyone having

FOOTSTEPS

lain on them recently. The dust was undisturbed except for a few footprints.

In that case the stopper had been thrown away, rather than thrown as a missile. Why had it been thrown away with violence? Violence in such an action always implies that the thrower has reason to resent either the thing thrown or something of which the thing thrown is a reminder or a symbol. The stopper of a poison bottle is doubtless a symbol of suicide, yet why throw the stopper without the bottle?

Dr. Hailey explained his actions to the policeman, who seemed an unusually intelligent young fellow.

"You have never by any chance heard," he asked, "that Mr. Featherstone took drugs?"

"No, sir." The man hesitated a moment. "All I ever heard about him," he said, "was that he was a bad lot . . . women and wine. . . . But if he was bad he was careful, too. I never saw anything amiss myself."

They heard steps approaching the door. The constable opened the door and admitted the Inspector. The man looked tired and rather crestfallen. He confessed to Dr. Hailey that all his efforts to find Raoul had been fruitless.

"We have orders from Scotland Yard to begin diggin' Mr. Diarmid's garden up to-morrow morning," he stated. "'They seem to think down there that it's a clear case of murder."

"Do you agree with them?"

The Inspector hesitated.

"Mr. Diarmid," he said, "doesn't strike me as the sort of man who is likely to commit a murder, though,

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of course, you never can tell. I'm going to see him now to inform him of the Yard's decision."

It was evident that the task was not one to which the man looked forward with any satisfaction. When he went away to perform it he took the policeman with him. Dr. Hailey resumed his investigations.

He examined the pillow in the bedroom and noted that an attempt had been made to cleanse it of blood. Then he descended and picked up the pieces of Lionel Leyland's walking-stick, which was still lying on a table in the room. He submitted both of them to a prolonged scrutiny and found, as he had expected to find, that the stick, a cherry, was heavily indented in several places. There could be no doubt that it had been broken by a blow from the poker during the encounter between Leyland and Raoul.

Leyland, then, had been compelled to defend himself with this fragile weapon against a most murderous assault. The doctor laid the pieces of walking-stick down again on the table and opened his snuff-box. It was the old story of the weak man driven into a corner, and rendered desperate. Probably Leyland had struck Raoul a severe blow in the first instance and so unbalanced the fellow's nerves. . . .

Dr. Hailey took a pinch of snuff and closed the box. He stiffened suddenly and listened intently. Soft footsteps, which he could only just hear, were moving round the studio.

He strode to the door and turned out the lights. He lifted the corner of one of the curtains and peered out. A street lamp in Langland Gardens threw a feeble illumination over the garden. He could no longer hear the sound which had disturbed him. He returned to the door and threw it open. There was

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nobody behind the door. The garden, so far as he could see, was empty. He re-entered the house and closed the door. It was possible that the sound which he had heard had come from the street. He remained in darkness, listening.

The footsteps began to move again, he thought at the side of the house. Could it be that Alaister Diarmid had returned to the studio to attempt to remove some other piece of evidence . . . the bloodstained pillow, perhaps? Or had Echo Wildermere . . .

He caught his breath sharply. Footsteps, which were quite different from the first footsteps, were coming up the flagged pathway from the street. The footsteps reached the door. A key was inserted in the lock of the door and the door cautiously opened. The doctor took a step back and crouched down. The intruder closed the door very softly and then the beam of an electric torch shone in the darkness. The beam moved across the floor until it reached the table on which the fragments of Lionel Leyland's walking-stick were lying. It remained for an instant focused on the fragments. Then the intruder walked to the table. Dr. Hailey saw a small hand appear in the beam of light and snatch at the pieces of stick. There was a gleam of diamonds . . . He took a quick step forward and switched up the lights.

Phyllis Leyland was revealed.

The girl dropped her torch, which was still lighted, on the floor. But she continued to clutch the broken walking-stick. The doctor saw her glance wildly round the studio.

"I . . . I had no idea there was anybody here," she managed to say in faltering accents.

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Dr. Hailey picked up the torch and extinguished it. He handed it back to the terrified girl with a bow.

"You were aware then," he said in gentle tones, "that your husband had left his walking-stick here?"

Phyllis did not reply for a moment. She seemed to be trying to collect her thoughts. At last she stated: "I had an appointment with Mr. Featherstone. I happened to see the walking-stick. . . ." She added piteously: "I came with my father. I have left him in the cab at the gate. . . ."

"When, if I may ask, was this appointment made?"

Phyllis raised her head and gazed at him. . . . She did not seem to have comprehended his question. He repeated it.

"I . . . I often come to visit Mr. Featherstone."

She allowed Dr. Hailey to see the key with which she had opened the door. Suddenly she put out her hand and caught at his arm.

"Where is Mr. Featherstone?" she asked.

"I don't know. Nobody knows. The whole police force of London is now looking for him."

An expression of utter bewilderment settled on the girl's features giving her a curiously childish look. The doctor saw a faint tinge of colour appear in her cheeks.

"How strange. . . . How terrible," she ejaculated.

Many questions hovered on her lips, but she did not dare to ask them. He saw ineffable relief gradually replace her surprise.

"The strangest thing of all," he stated, "is the fact that your cousin, Alaister Diarmid, found Featherstone lying wounded here last night, and carried him over to his studio. It was from your cousin's studio

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that Featherstone disappeared. At the time of his disappearance your cousin thought that he was dead, and so informed the Hampstead police."

Phyllis's colour faded again.

"How could he disappear if he was dead?" she asked in a whisper, adding: "He can't have been dead, can he?"

Dr. Hailey laid his finger, suddenly, on his lips. The soft footsteps which he had heard before the girl arrived were audible once more.

He sprang to the switch and again plunged the studio in darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII

"MURDER !"

DR. HAILEY stood behind the door undecided what he had better do next. The idea that Phyllis had come to the studio to meet Alaister flashed through his mind, but he dismissed it. Phyllis had certainly not known about the discovery of Raoul's body ; whereas if she had been in communication with her cousin she would have known about it. He did not wish Alaister to discover Phyllis in the studio.

He heard the girl's agitated breathing and returned to her side.

"Please try to be strong," he whispered. "I don't think that there is anything to fear. I'm going out to see who it is but I won't turn on the lights. . . ."

"Oh, no . . . no. . . ." Phyllis clutched his arm. . . .

"Listen, I have reason to think that it's your cousin. If so, I'll take him away from the door till you rejoin your father. . . ."

"No . . . No. . . ."

The girl's grasp tightened. She seemed to be in most deadly fear.

"I'm bound to be seen," she moaned.

The doctor remained silent for a few moments. Then, very gently, he disengaged himself.

"Please remain here."

“MURDER !”

He left her and lifted the curtain. He fancied that he could see someone bending down at the door as though trying to peer through the keyhole. He walked to the door and opened it.

Strong hands seized him and dragged him across the threshold.

He grappled with his adversary and managed to clutch him by the throat. But the man, at the same instant, raised his knee and inflicted a thrust which deprived him of his breath. His grip weakened and he felt himself being flung backwards. His head struck the wall of the studio.

A succession of violent blows were rained on his face. He managed to swing his body forward but he was nearly blind and could scarcely distinguish his opponent. He clutched wildly at the darkness in front of him.

“Help . . . Help . . . Murder. . . .”

He heard the words faintly. His hands encountered a human body and he tried to grapple with it. But it eluded his grasp. A fresh blow deprived him of his remaining strength and he staggered and pitched forward on the flagstones.

CHAPTER XIX

PANIC

PHYLLIS had withdrawn to the deepest shadow of the studio when Dr. Hailey opened the door. From that position she saw nothing of the encounter at the door. But the cry for help rang dreadfully in her ears. She rushed forward in time to see two dark figures struggling together on the threshold. As she drew near one of the figures was hurled to the ground.

The other figure sprang across the threshold into the studio and came lurching toward her. She felt her strength forsake her and crouched on the floor. The figure passed her and she heard the crash of an overturned table. She rose and was about to run towards the door when again the man passed her. He returned to the door. He shut the door so violently that the floor on which she was standing trembled. Had he left the studio or was he still beside her?

He had not left the studio ; she could hear him breathing. His breathing was laboured, like that of a sick person. He seemed to be standing quite still because, apart from the sound of his breathing, the silence was absolute. A terror, new and nameless, clutched at the girl's heart. What had happened to the doctor, and who was this man who had so brutally assaulted him ? She could not believe that Alaister would act in such a fashion, so that the doctor must have been

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mistaken about the footsteps. . . . Her mind rushed from one idea to another and from one fear to another. Who had uttered that dreadful cry? If the lights were turned up now she would be discovered instantly. . . . It was strange that he had not turned up the lights. . . . Perhaps she could reach the stair leading to Raoul's bedroom. . . .

She took a step in the darkness and then stood still, listening. . . . He was still breathing as heavily as ever, but he had not stirred. Another step . . . Another. . . . She put out her hand. . . . The banister of the stair should be within reach. . . . No, she could not find it. . . . Perhaps she had passed it. . . . She counted the heavy breaths. . . . "One, two, three. . . ." Ah! He was moving again. Another step. Her hand clutched at the wooden rail. She began to ascend. . . . He was trying to find the switch, because she could hear his hands moving on the wooden panels. . . .

She reached the top of the stair and, suddenly, Raoul's bedroom was revealed, the white bed, the black oak furniture, everything. She glanced back. The studio was full of light. She ran across the bedroom and crouched down behind the bed. Lionel's broken walking-stick rattled in her hand. . . . If only she had taken her father's advice and not come to the studio at all. . . . Her father would be dreadfully anxious about her. . . . He would be terribly upset, too, when he heard that Dr. Hailey had seen her. . . . She had promised him that no one should see her. . . .

Her mind grew clearer as the stress of the panic, which had seized her, abated. Since Dr. Hailey had seen her, it could not matter very much whether or

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not anybody else saw her. The mischief was done. Dr. Hailey, though, had been her father's friend; and he was a doctor, not a policeman. It was the police of whom her father was so greatly afraid. . . . The man who was prowling about downstairs could not be a policeman because he had attacked Dr. Hailey. Who could he be? . . . Was that a foot on the stair?

She glanced wildly about her. The window? It wasn't high, because the bedroom was built into the studio and there were flower-beds below it. She opened it and looked out. It was all dark in the garden. She clutched at the sill with her hands as though she felt herself already being thrust out into the darkness. The stairs creaked. He must be half-way up, now . . . Fresh panic seized her because, in that creaking sound, there was a quality of menace. . . . Oh, if only she possessed courage. If only she could stay where she was and receive him calmly. No, she must run away. . . . How slowly he climbed the stair. . . . Like a sick man. . . . She would be quite calm if she was out of this trap, but in the trap she couldn't be calm.

She rushed to the door. She slammed it so that its feeble panels started with the violence of the shock. There was no key in the lock. Frantically she pulled the bed to the door. She switched up the light and began piling on the bed everything on which she could lay her hands . . . chairs, a small table, Raoul's trouser stretchers, even his brushes and combs. She tried to move the wardrobe but it was too solid for her strength. . . . Her hat fell off and her hair was streaked over her brow. . . .

He had reached the door.

PANIC

She extinguished the light and ran back to the window. Then she saw that the bed was set on castors. It would not offer the least resistance in spite of all the furniture which she had piled on it. The handle of the door rattled ; the door was pushed open a few inches and a narrow shaft of light struck across the room. . . . There was a crash of furniture as the chairs and the tables were thrown to the floor. The shaft of light became a broad beam. . . .

"Lionel . . . !"

Phyllis sprang forward, but recoiled again when her husband switched on the lights. She uttered a cry of fear. Her husband's face was streaked with blood ; his eyes glared.

"So you're here . . . in his bedroom," he exclaimed.

He paused and leaned on the bed for a moment. . . . Phyllis sobbed with fear.

"My dear . . . I . . . I came to get your stick. . . ."

She snatched up the stick from the floor as she spoke and held it out to him. "I was afraid the police might think . . ."

Lionel stood erect. His lips moved. She realized that he was speaking to himself ; he had not heard her.

"I've killed Featherstone," he declared. "Now I'm going to kill you."

There was a dreadful certainty in his tones which convinced her. She stretched out her hands to him. . . .

"Lionel, I love you. I've always loved you. Raoul was only an infatuation. I swear that our friendship was friendship only. . . ."

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She sank on her knees. How could she make him hear her? If he only knew how she hated her cowardice he would pity her.

"It was for your sake, dear, that I came to-night, because I was so afraid that the police would find your stick. . . . Lionel, you won't hurt me. You mustn't hurt me. Lionel, I'm afraid of you. . . ."

He thrust the bed aside and came towards her. She saw his fingers stiffen. She sprang to the window and clambered on to the sill.

"Oh, God help me."

She jumped.

CHAPTER XX

"RAOUL'S GIRL"

SHE was not hurt. So God had heard her prayer. How beautiful the stars looked with the bare trees covering them like a lattice. How cool it was out here. She sat up. She could see Alaister Diarmid's house with its lighted windows.

She pressed her hands to her eyes and squeezed them. She was getting frightened again. She rose to her feet and leaned against the wall. To reach her Lionel would require to come half-way round the house, but it would not take long. If only she had not grown so weak? . . . Her legs seemed to be scarcely able to carry her.

She heard the bang of a door. She started out across the flower-bed into which she had fallen. The wall of Alaister's garden was close beside her. She turned at the wall and looked back, but the darkness revealed nothing. She listened. Footsteps were approaching. She summoned all her strength and managed to raise herself to the top of the wall, but her strength failed her with that effort and she sank back again. The footsteps were close beside her now, but she judged that her husband could not see her because his steps halted and then moved again, and then halted once more. She did not dare

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to stir in case she disclosed her whereabouts ; she crouched down under the wet bricks.

Had he hunted Raoul in this way before he wounded him ? Raoul was bold enough, but she did not think that he was brave. His nerves would fail him just as her nerves had failed her. . . . He was moving again, coming nearer. She stood erect and grasped the top of the wall once more. She felt her heart thumping against her ribs. A moment later she was running across Alaister's lawn towards the lighted windows. . . .

His hands seized her.

She shrieked and struggled in his grasp. She tried to fling herself down, away from those terrible hands, which already choked at her throat. Pleas and promises surged to her dumb lips. . . .

And then, suddenly, a great peace enveloped her. She ceased to struggle . . . to be afraid. Only her love for this man who was killing her remained in her mind. Her love grew and glowed until it filled her mind with light. . . .

"Help . . . help ! . . ."

She opened her eyes. She was aware, dimly, of a struggle taking place beside her. She drew a deep breath and then her hands sought her throat. . . . She staggered to her feet but fell again instantly. . . . Someone bent over her . . . a woman.

"Are you all right ?"

"Oh, yes. . . ."

The woman chafed her hands. Then she put her arms round her.

"I'll help you to rise. I'm afraid I'm not strong enough to carry you."

"RAOUL'S GIRL"

"Where is he ? . . ."

"Gone."

Phyllis sat up again. . . .

"It was Lionel, my husband. He's dreadfully ill. We must find him at once. . . ." She gazed at her rescuer whose face was just visible in the light which filtered through Alaister's drawn blinds.

"Who are you ?" she asked.

"Echo Wildermere."

"What, Raoul's girl ?"

"Yes."

"Is Alaister here ?"

"He's gone to do something to his car. He's going away for the night."

"We must get him at once . . . and Kennedy, too. Lionel's mad, I think."

Phyllis grasped Echo's arm and allowed herself to be led towards the door of the house. She felt her strength returning.

"Will you call Kennedy. I shall be better in a minute or two and we can begin to look for him."

"Kennedy isn't in, unfortunately. This is his night off."

"Oh, dear. . . ." Phyllis stood still. "What happened ? What did you do to Lionel ?"

"I just put my arm round his neck. I thought he would attack me, but he didn't. After a minute he let you go. When you fell he disappeared."

They reached the door and entered Alaister's smoke-room. Phyllis sat down and put her head between her hands. . . .

"How brave you are," she murmured.

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She swayed in her seat and would have fallen if Echo had not caught her. When she was a little better Echo rang the bell for Lolotte.

"Get me some brandy."

They heard Alaister coming in from the garage.

CHAPTER XXI

"I COULDN'T HELP IT"

PHYLLIS told Alaister what had happened while Echo gave her sips of brandy and Lolotte stood waiting beside her.

"I'm afraid Dr. Hailey was very much hurt. . . ."

"Damn Dr. Hailey. . . . We must find Lionel. I have only a minute or two to spare." He turned to Lolotte. "When will your father be back?"

"He's usually pretty late, sir. He's gone to Flask Walk, I think."

Alaister strode out of the room and opened the front door. He switched up the garden lights and then crossed the lawn. Lying on the terrace below the lawn was a black object which showed up against the flagstones. He called to Echo to join him and then descended to the terrace.

"He's unconscious, I think. We'll have to carry him."

They laid Lionel on the couch on which Raoul had been laid. His breathing had become stertorous again and his cheeks were cyanosed. Alaister rang up his own doctor on the telephone and asked him to come at once.

"Dr. Brown will be here in five minutes," he announced. "What about your father, Phyllis? If you like I'll run down to his cab and tell him

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what has happened. It's not fair to keep him in suspense any longer. . . ."

Phyllis was kneeling beside her husband, holding one of his hands in her hands. She turned to Alaister.

"Oh, no, please. When he saw you he would think something awful had happened to me, and his heart won't stand any more shocks. I must go to him myself. . . ."

"Don't be silly, you can't go yourself."

"I must go." Phyllis rose as she spoke. "Lionel is quite safe now, I think. I shall send father home and then come back. . . . Perhaps you can wait till the doctor comes."

She walked to the door. But before she reached it she had begun to stagger. Alaister put his arm round her waist. . . .

"I'll take you down in the car if Echo doesn't mind being left alone for a few minutes." He turned to Lolotte. "Stay with Miss Wildermere, please, till we come back."

Lolotte still held the glass of brandy in her hand. She looked scared. Echo on the contrary was entirely self-possessed.

"I don't mind in the least," she said.

Alaister gave Phyllis his arm and conducted her to the car.

"I wish I wasn't such a fool, Alaister," she apologized. "But my legs don't seem to have any strength left in them. I would give anything to possess Echo's self-control."

"Echo hasn't been half-murdered, has she?"

"No, but she's brave. She has daring. She can fight. If only I could fight . . . sometimes."

Alaister didn't reply. He helped her into the car

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and started the engine. There were several tins of petrol on the floor of the vehicle and she had to sit huddled up.

"Are you going a long way to-night?"

"Yes."

When they turned down Langland Gardens Phyllis uttered an exclamation of dismay. The road was empty.

"Gone!"

"It seems like it."

"Oh, he will be so terribly upset. . . ." She grasped Alaister's sleeve. "Could you take me home? I simply must relieve his mind. If you drive very fast . . ."

The pace of the car increased and they raced down to Finchley Road. . . . Alaister asked:

"Did he say he would go home if you didn't return soon?"

"No. But I told him I wouldn't be a minute. You see, I knew exactly where Lionel's walking-stick was lying. He was so terrified that anybody might see us that I expect his nerves got the better of him just like my nerves do."

She caught her breath in a sob of anxiety. Suddenly she turned to Alaister.

"I haven't told you everything. Father is afraid that I may be accused of murdering poor Raoul. He begged and begged me not to take the risk of coming up here to get Lionel's walking-stick, but I couldn't bear to think . . ." She broke off suddenly. "Oh, can I trust you, Alaister?"

"Shouldn't if I were you."

"I'm going to, because I must tell somebody. When Lionel came back yesterday from seeing you

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and Echo he was most terribly excited. He said that Raoul was a scoundrel and that I had been deceived and ruined . . . and heaps of other dreadful things. I was fearfully upset because I thought that—that—Raoul cared for me. . . .”

“Yes, I know.”

“What, Lionel didn’t tell you about me, did he?”

“Yes. Said if you came back to him he would welcome you. He needed you and the world seemed damnably empty without you.” Alaister guided the car past Swiss Cottage. “Poor devil, I was sorry for him.”

Phyllis gasped. . . . He heard her murmuring words to herself.

“If you knew how I loathe myself! Alaister, dear, will you believe me when I say that I love Lionel? Raoul was nothing really, only a dreadful foolish mistake. There was something about him which got me at first and made me feel I had never really loved Lionel as a husband ought to be loved. I was so terribly sorry for Lionel . . . more sorry for him even than for myself. I made up my mind that I must leave him at once. . . . It seems just like a wild dreadful nightmare. When Lionel told me that Raoul was engaged to Echo I woke up. I tried to tell Lionel that it was all a dream and that he mustn’t worry any more, but he wouldn’t listen to me. He said that he was going to thrash Raoul to ribbons. . . .”

She put her hand on Alaister’s arm and grasped it.

“As soon as Lionel left the house I rang Raoul up on the telephone, but there was no reply, so I thought he must have gone away for the night. I waited, expecting Lionel to come home. It got fearfully

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late, and I grew so frightened that I couldn't rest. I rang up father and asked him if Lionel had gone there, but he hadn't. At last I felt I must go to the studio myself. . . ."

She caught her breath. . . .

"Go on."

"When I was coming up the path to the house I saw someone, a woman, running across your lawn. Your windows were lighted, you see. The door of the studio was shut, but I had my key—Raoul gave me a key so that if he was out any time I could go in and wait for him. Raoul was lying on the floor, full length, on his face. I ran to him, and then I saw that there was a knife sticking in his neck. . . . I pulled the knife out. There was a dreadful gush of blood. I am such a coward, Alaister. Everything began to spin round and round ; I felt I was going to faint. I tried to find a towel . . . something to stop the bleeding with. Then I saw Lionel's walking-stick lying broken on the floor beside Raoul. And then at that very moment a policeman blew his whistle close to the house. . . ."

She stopped and pressed her hands to her eyes.

"I can scarcely remember what happened after that. But I must have lost all my nerve. I ran away—I ran and ran. The streets were empty. I realized all of a sudden that I still had the knife in my hand. There was blood, too, on my frock. I had meant to take the knife in case it belonged to Lionel. I hid it in my bodice. I got a cab and drove to father's : I felt I couldn't face Lionel just then, knowing what he had done and that I was the cause of it all. And then I remembered that I had left his walking-stick. I didn't dare to go back for it."

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The car entered Baker Street. She turned and glanced at her companion.

"I couldn't help it," she pleaded, "I just couldn't help it."

"I know. Was Raoul . . . He didn't try to attack you when you pulled the knife out of the wound?"

Phyllis started.

"Oh, no, no. I thought he was dead. Father wasn't in bed when I got back because my telephone call had upset him. I told him everything. Do you know, I felt too frightened and exhausted to go with him to Curzon Street when he said he must see whether or not Lionel was there. I rushed off to my bedroom. In the middle of the night he roused me to tell me that Lionel had been injured."

Alaister remained silent. If this was a true story then Phyllis's coming had surprised Echo and driven her out of the studio. She had gone back to the studio, though, before she came to him, because when he found Raoul the wound in his neck had been bandaged.

They reached Dudley Titling's door. Phyllis opened the door. She ran into her father's smoking-room and came out of it with a white face. . . .

"He's not here."

She glanced at the hat-rack, and then moved the coats which hung on the rack.

"Alaister, he hasn't come home; he hasn't come home. . . ." She seized Alaister's arm. "What can have happened to him? . . ."

"Perhaps he's gone to bed. . . ."

"Oh, no, never. He would never go to bed till he knew I was safe. . . ."

"I COULDN'T HELP IT"

She rushed upstairs, nevertheless. A door in the hall opened and an old woman appeared.

"Mr. Alaister?"

"Yes, Margaret. Has—has Uncle Dudley gone to bed?"

"Oh, no, sir. He's not back yet. He and Miss Phyllis . . ."

Phyllis appeared on the stairs. . . .

"Margaret, where's father?"

"My dear, my dear, I thought he was with you."

The old woman began to run about aimlessly between the stairs and the front door, as if she expected her master to discover himself like a lost coin. Phyllis descended to the hall.

"Something must have happened to him, Alaister, something awful."

"Oh, nonsense. Probably he sent the cab away and hung about waiting for you in the garden. We may easily have missed him."

Alaister spoke like a man in a dream. He kept glancing at the front door.

"If you like I'll ring up Echo," he said. "He may have gone to my place."

He strode into the smoking-room. Phyllis and Margaret followed him. The old woman was wringing her hands and anticipating a hundred evils. The idea crossed his mind that the fact that Margaret had been Phyllis's nurse probably accounted for his cousin's shattered nerves. Margaret's world was always falling about her ears.

"Is that you, Echo? What? I'm at Uncle Dudley's with Phyllis. . . . What do you say? Very well, I'll bring Phyllis back."

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He put down the receiver. He turned to face the women.

"He's at my place."

"Oh, thank God!" Phyllis sat down in a chair and covered her face with her hands. Alaister signed to Margaret to accompany him to the hall.

"I want to leave something here," he told her. "A cast I'm taking to the country with me to-night. There won't be room in the car if I bring Phyllis and Uncle Dudley back."

He ran down the steps and returned with a big package done up in sacking.

"I'll take it upstairs to Uncle Dudley's dressing-room because it's rather precious."

Phyllis was still seated where he had left her when he returned to the smoking-room. She looked so dreadfully tired that he asked Margaret to give her some more brandy before he took her back with him to Hampstead.

In the car he asked his cousin for her latchkey. "But you will be bringing father back with you, won't you?"

"No." He drew the car to the kerb and laid his hand on Phyllis's arm.

"I have bad news for you, dear. . . ."

"Not . . . not about Lionel . . ." Phyllis's voice was hushed to a whisper.

"No . . . about Uncle Dudley . . . your father. . . . He . . . he's dead, dear."

CHAPTER XXII

A NEUROTIC WOMAN

DR. HAILEY had discovered Dudley Titling's body when he recovered from the effects of his encounter with Lionel Leyland, whom, in the last stages of the encounter, he had recognized. The body was lying on the flagstones near the door of Raoul's studio, huddled up as though the little man had been crouching at the moment of his death. The doctor picked the body up and carried it into the study.

He laid it on the floor and sank down into a chair. His head was throbbing and he felt shaken, nevertheless he congratulated himself on a fortunate escape. Falling with that force he might easily have fractured his skull. When he had rested for a few moments he knelt down and made a quick examination of the body. There was no sign of violence, and he had little doubt that Dudley Titling had met his death as the result of one of his heart attacks. He covered the little wizened face with a handkerchief and walked to the door of the studio. He must find a policeman at once, for it was quite likely that Lionel Leyland had assaulted others as well as himself. The man was temporarily insane, and was likely to mistake everybody he met for Raoul Featherstone. He was about to close the door when he heard someone approaching. Next moment Echo Wildermere appeared in the beam of light. . . .

RED SCAR

"Thank goodness, you're all right," she cried. "Mrs. Leyland told us you had been attacked, and I felt I must come and make sure that nothing had happened to you." She saw the body lying on the floor of the studio, and started. . . . "What—what has happened?"

Dr. Hailey told her. He noted the fact that there were tears in her eyes when he finished his story. She informed him about Phyllis's escape.

"Dr. Brown is with Major Leyland now," she declared. "I think he takes rather a serious view of his condition. He wanted to ring up the Hampstead police but I told him the case was in the hands of Scotland Yard, so he rang them up instead. Inspector Biles is coming to the house at once."

She put her hand on the doctor's arm.

"The police called on Mr. Diarmid to-night," she said, "while I was with him, to tell him that they are going to dig up his garden to-morrow morning. That means, doesn't it, that they think he killed Raoul and buried his body?"

There was just a tremor of anxiety in the girl's voice. Dr. Hailey glanced at her beautiful, interesting face before he answered her.

"It means that they think he may have buried the body, certainly."

Echo hesitated for a moment.

"Has Alaister . . . Mr. Diarmid . . . said that he killed Raoul?" she asked in low tones.

She was master of herself, but the doctor observed that her grasp of his arm had tightened.

"I don't think I can answer that question," he said.

A NEUROTIC WOMAN

They walked towards Alaister's house. Echo helped him to climb the wall into Alaister's garden. When they reached the lawn they heard the insistent buzzing of the telephone bell.

"Oh, I say, everybody must be upstairs in Major Leyland's bedroom."

The girl left her companion and ran to answer the call. Dr. Hailey followed her across the lawn. He thought again how greatly and truly Alaister had portrayed her, her impulsiveness, her courage, her quick wits and that other quality to which he found it so difficult to give a name.

He entered the house and ascended the stairs to the bedroom to which Lionel Leyland had been carried. Leyland had fallen asleep and Dr. Brown was sitting beside the bed watching him.

"I've given him morphia," Dr. Brown said. "His brain is evidently in a highly irritable condition. I don't feel at all sure that he may not become violent again."

"We must get a male nurse. I blame myself for leaving him in the hands of a woman. If there is no improvement to-morrow I suggest that we call in McDonald and have an X-ray taken. It is just possible that a piece of bone has been driven into the brain itself."

Dr. Brown nodded. He had reached the same conclusion.

"Was it a blow from a poker?"

"Yes."

Dr. Hailey descended to the lounge. He found Biles there waiting for him. He noticed that Biles looked rather tired and dispirited. He told him everything that had happened.

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"My own opinion, my dear Biles, for what it may be worth, is that the knife was not carried to Curzon Street by Leyland. As I have said, Leyland could scarcely have inflicted a wound within a few minutes of receiving that blow on his head . . . on the contrary, he must almost certainly have lain unconscious on the floor for a good half-hour after receiving the blow. On the other hand, Featherstone could not have struck so heavy a blow at Leyland after he had been wounded. I feel pretty sure that Featherstone sustained his wound some time after he struck Leyland."

Biles frowned. "How did the knife reach Curzon Street if Leyland didn't take it there?" he asked.

"I think Dudley Titling took it there. You will admit that it was strange that he should have asked me for a prescription in the way he did . . . and told me that I would find a sheet of notepaper in the very drawer in which the knife was lying."

Dr. Hailey took a pinch of snuff.

"Titing's midnight visit to his son-in-law's house suggests that he was uneasy about something. I have asked myself: 'What could have happened at that late hour to rouse his anxiety?' and I think I have found the answer. His daughter, Phyllis, as we know, spent the night with him. We know also that she had been to Featherstone's studio, because, had she not been there, she would not have come back this evening to recover her husband's walking-stick. She knew that her husband's walking-stick was in the studio."

"Yes. . . . That seems reasonable."

"Why did she come back for the walking-stick so secretly? Why didn't she visit the studio boldly

A NEUROTIC WOMAN

in the daytime and take the stick away openly? Obviously because the stick was connected in her mind with some terrible event. It was not a mere walking-stick that she was recovering but a damning piece of evidence. The walking-stick showed that her husband had been in the studio and had used violence in the studio."

"You mean that when Mrs. Leyland came to the studio, Featherstone was lying there?"

"Yes. I feel sure, too, that she thought he was dead and that her husband had killed him. As I told you before, I believe that Mrs. Leyland loves her husband—in spite of her infatuation for Featherstone. The conviction that she had driven her husband to murder must have overwhelmed her with fear and grief. I imagine that she snatched up the knife, which she thought, no doubt, belonged to Lionel Leyland, and fled in terror from the studio. Later on she would remember that she had seen the walking-stick lying on the floor."

Dr. Hailey adjusted his eyeglass and leaned forward in his chair.

"Her first impulse would be to go home. Her second to obtain her father's help. As we know, she went to her father. Very shortly after her arrival at his house Dudley Titling visited his son-in-law. He found his son-in-law in a highly excited state, talking about murder. He must, I think, have reached the same conclusion as his daughter had reached—that Leyland had killed Featherstone. For which reason, probably, he made a hurried and very quiet exit from the house and took the precaution this morning to place the knife, which his daughter had so rashly brought home with her, in his son-in-law's desk . . .

RED SCAR

on the principle, doubtless, that evidences of guilt belong to the guilty. Dudley Titling would have sacrificed a dozen sons-in-law to save his daughter from any danger."

The detective got up and began to pace the floor.

"It sounds plausible," he said. "But how can you be sure that Mrs. Leyland did not herself wound Featherstone? After all, she had a strong motive."

"I can't be absolutely sure, of course. But from my knowledge of her I feel that she didn't. Unless she had believed that her husband was guilty she would not have run the risk of coming to the studio to-night to recover his walking-stick. The fact that she brought her father with her on this expedition shows that she had no idea that her father had placed the knife in her husband's desk. Phyllis Leyland was desperately anxious to avert suspicion from her husband, not to direct it towards him. She went out of her way this morning to tell me that she had given her husband great provocation.

"Hm. One of the best ways of accusing people, my dear Hailey, is to excuse them."

They heard a car approaching the house. A moment later Alaister ushered Phyllis Leyland into the room.

"I should like," Biles said, "to speak to Mrs. Leyland alone for a few minutes."

The sculptor withdrew. Phyllis, who had been weeping, sat down in one of the big leather arm-chairs.

"I think," Biles remarked in grave tones, "that the tragedy of your father's death, Mrs. Leyland, should convince you of the duty which lies on you of telling the whole truth about this deplorable business." He added: "You need not be afraid for your husband's safety. It is practically certain that

A NEUROTIC WOMAN

he had nothing to do with the wounding of Featherstone."

"What . . . you don't think it was Lionel? . . ."

Phyllis gasped with astonishment. The colour rushed back to her face in a full flood bestowing upon her again all her good looks. She glanced about the room like a sleeper awakened suddenly from a nightmare. With a haste that was quite reckless she poured out her story of her discovery of Raoul's body.

"Did you tell your father this story?" Biles asked when she had finished.

"Yes."

The detective took a note-book from his pocket.

"I understand that you had been on terms of intimacy with Mr. Raoul Featherstone?" he asked.

"I was his friend."

Phyllis stiffened slightly and her tones conveyed a rebuke. Dr. Hailey, who was watching her, saw that she resented strongly the implication that she had been involved in an ordinary intrigue.

"You possess a latchkey to his door, I understand?"

"Yes."

"And you told your husband that you were going to leave home in order to live with Mr. Featherstone?"

"Oh, please don't put it like that. The real truth is that I wasn't sure whether my feelings towards Lionel were as sincere and deep as a wife's feelings ought to be. Raoul attracted me so strongly that I began to feel that I had been cheating Lionel of his happiness. . . ."

"Please answer my question: Did you or did you not tell your husband that you were going to leave him?"

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Dr. Hailey saw an expression of fear in the girl's face.

"Yes, I did. For his sake as well as for my own."

"Later, on the same day, did your husband tell you that he had heard that Mr. Featherstone was engaged to be married to Miss Echo Wildermere?"

"Yes. And then my feelings changed completely. The scales seemed to fall from my eyes. I knew suddenly and wonderfully that I had never loved Raoul for a single moment. All my love had been Lionel's from the very beginning."

Biles made a note in his book.

"Did you tell your husband about this change in your feelings?" he asked.

"No, I didn't. I wanted him to learn it for himself. I wanted him to feel, day by day, that our time of darkness had passed for ever."

"I see. And meanwhile you knew that he was going to the studio to give your lover a thrashing."

"Oh, I begged him not to do that. I was dreadfully frightened."

The detective thrust out his long neck and fixed his eyes on the girl's face.

"I suggest to you," he said, "that you did not believe what your husband told you about Featherstone and Miss Wildermere."

Phyllis's eyes fell before the searching scrutiny.

"It is difficult to believe that one has been grossly deceived," she murmured.

"And that, consequently, when you visited Featherstone's studio you expected to find your lover unchanged in his feelings towards you? . . ."

"I went to the studio because I was afraid. . . ."

A NEUROTIC WOMAN

"Possibly. I suggest that, on the contrary, you found Miss Wildermere with your lover. . . ."

"It isn't true." Phyllis clutched at the arms of the chair and strained forwards. "I have told you exactly what I found."

"Please don't interrupt me. I suggest further that Featherstone ordered you out of his house and that you refused to go. In the quarrel which followed either you or Miss Wildermere wounded Featherstone."

The colour sank out of Phyllis's cheeks. . . .

"It isn't true. . . ." She turned suddenly to Dr. Hailey. "Do tell him, please, that you saw me trying to find Lionel's walking-stick, before Lionel discovered us in the studio."

"I have already told him that." Dr. Hailey addressed the detective. "Why should Mrs. Leyland have come back for her husband's walking-stick if she herself was guilty?"

"Because the fact that her husband had thrashed Featherstone, if it was discovered, would inevitably connect her with Featherstone's murder . . . with Featherstone's injury. . . . Mrs. Leyland refused this morning, as no doubt you remember, to tell me the name of her lover."

Phyllis was weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHISKY AND SODA

"I THINK, my dear Biles," Dr. Hailey said when Phyllis had left the room, "that you are putting too little emphasis on Alaister Diarmid's share in this business. The sculptor did not even take the trouble to ring up his uncle and cousin and tell them that Featherstone had disappeared, whereas he took the utmost pains to shield Echo Wildermere. Is it conceivable that, if your ideas are correct, he would have held no communication with Phyllis Leyland? Echo Wildermere would have told him that Phyllis Leyland had been present."

"How do you know that he held no communication with her?"

"Because she came to recover the walking-stick. She would not have come had she so much as suspected that the police were in possession of the premises."

The doctor spoke earnestly; he saw that he had made some impression on his companion.

"That certainly is a point," Biles conceded. "Isn't it possible though, that Miss Wildermere told Diarmid nothing about Mrs. Leyland's share in what had occurred?"

"I could see no reason why she should not tell him and a great many reasons why she should tell him. Phyllis Leyland is his cousin. Miss Echo Wildermere

WHISKY AND SODA

is not, I think, the kind of woman who hesitates to face facts."

They went across to the studio and Biles made a quick inspection of Dudley Titling's body before it was removed to the Hampstead mortuary. Then they returned to Alaister's house. Alaister, still dressed in his motoring coat and cap, was waiting for them in the lounge.

"I wish," he said to Biles, "to repeat to you what I told Dr. Hailey earlier in the day. That it was I who wounded Raoul Featherstone. I'm going into the country for the night, but shall be back to-morrow morning, if you wish to make a charge against me."

"It will be time enough to make a charge against you, I think, when we have found Mr. Featherstone."

Biles's tones were dry. Alaister's off-handish manner clearly caused him great annoyance. He added:

"I'm afraid I must ask you, meanwhile, to spare me a few minutes as there are some questions which I have to put to you. Did the police, by the way, tell you that they had orders to dig up your garden to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, they told me."

Biles walked to the fireplace and extended his hands to the fire. . . .

"Has Miss Wildermere gone home?" he asked.

"No."

"Then I should like very much if she could join us. My questions concern her as well as yourself."

Alaister left the room and returned with Echo. He offered drinks, but his offer was refused.

"Don't mind if I have one myself, do you?"

"Not at all."

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Alaister rang the bell and Kennedy appeared.

"Whisky and soda, please."

The sculptor sat down and began to fill his pipe.

"You have stated, haven't you," Biles asked him, "that so far as you know Miss Wildermere did not visit Featherstone's studio last night?"

"Yes. I know that she didn't visit it. . . ."

The detective turned to Echo.

"*Did* you visit the studio?" he asked

Echo remained silent.

"Please answer me."

The silence was unbroken. Biles uttered an exclamation of anger.

"I see," he cried, "Mr. Diarmid has extracted from you a promise not to open your mouth. . . . Let me tell you that such a course may have very serious consequences for yourself as well as for him."

Alaister scowled.

"Let me tell you, Inspector, that you'll gain nothing here by browbeating women. Miss Wildermere is engaged to me. I'll answer for her, if you please, until a judge, or somebody with a judge's authority, orders differently."

The detective controlled himself, but Dr. Hailey saw that he had become quite pale round the lips.

"Very well. Will you be good enough then to explain on Miss Wildermere's behalf how it has come about that whereas yesterday she accepted a diamond engagement ring from Featherstone, to-day she is engaged to yourself?"

"That's a personal matter."

"It's a matter which bears very closely on this case."

WHISKY AND SODA

"Very well then, Miss Wildermere changed her mind."

"We have the receipt for Featherstone's engagement ring," Biles sneered. "May I ask if, when the engagement was broken off, the ring was returned?"

"It was not returned."

"Why not?"

"Because the engagement was not broken off."

Alaister jumped up and stood in front of the fire. His coat fell open revealing the strong lines of his neck.

"Unfortunately my temper got the better of me before Miss Wildermere had time to break off the engagement."

"May I ask when you and Miss Wildermere became engaged?"

"This morning."

The detective leaned forward in his chair :

"So that if Miss Wildermere did, in spite of your denial, visit Featherstone last night, she probably broke off her engagement to him."

Biles's voice rasped.

"If . . . If . . . If . . . I have told you that she didn't visit him." Alaister turned to Dr. Hailey. . . . "You saw Featherstone's engagement ring here this morning, didn't you?"

"I saw a ring which you led me to suppose was your engagement ring. . . ."

"That isn't the point . . . what I'm trying to make clear is that Echo didn't break off her engagement last night. Had she done so she wouldn't have been in possession of her engagement ring this morning."

Biles made an entry in his book.

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"Your cousin, Mrs. Leyland," he said, "has just told me that when she arrived at Featherstone's studio last night she saw a woman running away across your lawn."

"She saw me, as a matter of fact. Her visit to the studio took place while I was there—just after I had wounded Featherstone. I heard her coming and cleared out in a hurry. After she went away I returned and brought Featherstone across here."

"Mrs. Leyland stated positively that it was a woman whom she saw."

Alaister lit his pipe.

"It's so easy to be sure about a thing like that in pitch darkness, isn't it?"

There was a knock at the door. Kennedy entered the room with a tray. He set it down on a side table.

'Where's the soda?'

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I've omitted it. . . ."

The servant hurried away to repair his mistake. Alaister took the stopper out of the whisky bottle.

"You see. Even a well-trained butler can look a tray in the face in broad light and fail to observe the absence from it of a siphon. What people see or fail to see in the dark doesn't signify a hoot."

There was a knock at the door. Phyllis Leyland appeared at the door and signed to Dr. Hailey to join her. The doctor left the room just as Kennedy returned with the siphon.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MONSTER

INSPECTOR BILES was accustomed to dealing with people who met all his wishes, frightened people, for the most part, with scattered wits. He found Alaister's defiance exceedingly disconcerting. While Alaister worked the siphon in short jerks he sat staring at him gloomily.

"Everybody," the sculptor said, "appears to be concerned about who wounded Featherstone, whereas the real mystery is who snatched him away and hid him. Upon my soul, it's the queerest thing I ever heard of." He took a big gulp of whisky. "I don't want to discourage you in advance, but, as a matter of fact, you won't find Featherstone in my garden."

He turned round to find his matches on the mantelpiece. . . .

"I begin to think," he added, "that we were all wrong about his being so desperately ill. If Lionel Leyland could run about after his skull was cracked, I don't see why Featherstone shouldn't have run, too, after he was stuck in the back of the neck. The wound was in the fleshy part near the shoulder. He's a bit of a weakling and he was scared stiff, as I happen to know."

Biles did not offer any comment on these observations. His glance moved restlessly round the room

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and came to the door of Alaister's workroom. Echo, who was watching him, saw him start slightly.

"Is your statue still on the premises?" he asked.

"It is. Do you want to see it?"

Alaister took a step forward and then turned back to face the detective. Biles had risen from his chair. The sculptor strode across the room and opened the door of his workroom. He left the door open so that Echo might share in the view. He unveiled the statue.

"There you are . . . twice as large as life. . . ."

The detective measured the big cast with his eyes. Alaister saw his eyes gleam.

"When did you make this cast?" he asked sharply.

"Last night. It's the second edition, as a matter of fact. My housemaid broke the first edition yesterday when she was covering it."

Biles walked round the cast. He examined Andromeda's bound feet with close attention and then glanced upwards at her pinioned arms. He turned to Alaister.

"Before my men begin to dig your garden to-morrow," he said, "I propose to examine the contents of this cast."

His voice rasped; he kept his eyes fixed on the sculptor's face. . . .

"Why wait till to-morrow, my dear sir, when there's to-night?"

Alaister stepped to his work-bench and picked up a mallet. He held it out to the detective.

"Go ahead."

"Certainly not. I have no authority to break your property."

THE MONSTER

"What, not if I give you authority?"

"No."

Alaister turned. He struck the cast a blow which completely shattered it. The air of the workroom was filled with fine dust. . . . He walked out of the workroom leaving Biles to search, if he chose, among the debris. He saw Dr. Hailey, his eyeglass in his eye, surveying the wreckage from the door of the lounge.

"Another illusion dissipated, my dear doctor," he remarked in biting tones.

Dr. Hailey informed Biles that Lionel Leyland desired to make a statement to him and that both Dr. Brown and himself considered that Leyland should be humoured in this matter.

"He's undoubtedly in a very serious condition. . . ."

The detective emerged from the workroom and walked to the door without even glancing at Alaister, who stood, glass in hand, watching him pass. When the door closed behind him Alaister turned to Echo.

"Serves him right," he exclaimed. "He asked for it. But didn't he look sick."

"I . . . I feel . . . Oh, why did you make me promise not to tell, Alaister? They're bound to find out that you've lied to them about me, and then . . ."

"How are they bound to find out? . . . Unless we tell them, they'll never find out. You don't suppose I buried your cloak and hat in Featherstone's garden, do you?" He came to the girl and took her hand. "Dear," he asked, "would you . . . would you care still if . . . if it was true that I did really wound Featherstone?"

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His voice was huskier than usual. Echo gazed at him with horrified eyes. . . .

"What!" she whispered.

"Would you care for me . . . even then?"

He gazed down hungrily into her face. He saw the face of Andromeda as he had portrayed it looking at the Monster. . . .

Echo's lips parted:

"I shall always care for you," she said, "whatever you do."

CHAPTER XXV

THE DUTY OF EVERY CITIZEN

DR. HAILEY did not accompany Biles to Lionel Leyland's bedroom. When the detective had disappeared round the corner of the stair, he opened the front door very quietly and stepped out into the garden. He walked through the garden to the private road.

Alaister's saloon was standing in the private road. The side-lights were on and it had been backed in from Frogmal Lane so as to be ready for immediate departure. The doctor turned up the collar of his overcoat before he approached the car. Then he opened one of the doors and stepped in. He shut the door behind him and immediately lighted the small electric torch which he always carried.

There were two spare tins of petrol on the floor, beside the driver's seat, and three other spare tins beside the back seat . . . enough petrol for a journey of three hundred miles at least.

A puzzled expression appeared on Dr. Hailey's face. He focused the beam of his torch on the back seat of the car and moved it very slowly across the seat. Then he rubbed his finger lightly across the seat. He directed the beam of light on to his finger.

A little fine white dust had adhered to the skin of his finger.

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He continued his scouting and found several small pieces of straw. A second application of his finger to the leather cushions yielded the same results as the first application.

He opened the door of the car and was about to descend from the vehicle when, suddenly, his body grew rigid. Footsteps were approaching the vehicle from the house. He jumped out and stood in the beam of the car's lamps. He pulled his snuff-box from his pocket, and took a pinch with much deliberation. But his pose of indifference was not necessary after all, for the footsteps ceased to advance.

Kennedy, the butler, perhaps, making a round before going to bed. . . .

Dr. Hailey walked back slowly to the front door and re-entered the lounge. Alaister was gulping the last mouthfuls of his drink.

"Miss Wildermere has been good enough to say that she'll stay here till the male nurse comes," he announced. "I shouldn't like to leave Phyllis alone."

"Oh, Dr. Brown is staying till the nurse comes."

Dr. Hailey left the room and closed the door behind him. He went out across the lawn towards Raoul Featherstone's studio. His head was still throbbing and he found the descent of the garden wall rather difficult. He walked straight down to Langland Gardens without entering the studio.

He picked up a cab at the bottom of Langland Gardens and gave the man Dudley Titling's home address. He lay back wearily in the vehicle, promising himself that, if the reasoning on which he was now acting proved unsound, he would return home at once. When the cab began to approach its destination he turned and looked out of the small window

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at the back. He continued to look out of the window until the vehicle came to the kerb. He descended quickly and handed the driver his fare, then he ascended the steps of the house and rang the bell.

There was no light in any of the windows and silence brooded over the place. The doctor wondered whether or not it was the fact that he knew that Dudley Titling was dead which gave him, on this threshold, a feeling of loneliness and emptiness. Houses, he thought, derive some subtle quality from their occupants. . . .

He rang a second time. He kept turning his head anxiously to watch the approaches to the house; every time a private car appeared in the street he drew back a little towards the door . . . ah, someone coming at last. . . .

The door was opened by Margaret. She started back on seeing a stranger, but Dr. Hailey's genial face seemed to reassure her.

"I have come," Dr. Hailey said, "because Mrs. Leyland is staying the night at her cousin's house at Hampstead, and doesn't wish you to wait up for her any longer. Mr. Alaister Diarmid left a package here, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He took it upstairs to the Master's dressing-room."

"Quite so. Well, he's coming back for it to-night. I'm going to wait here till he comes. So you can go to bed now."

Dr. Hailey closed the front door as he spoke. Margaret led him across the hall to a room which faced the street. She switched up the lights. She seemed to be about to enter into a discussion of her anxieties about her master and mistress when the

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doctor cut her short by saying that she looked very tired and that he advised her to go to bed at once.

As soon as he was alone Dr. Hailey turned out the lights. Then he opened the door of the room and listened. He could hear no sound. He walked on tiptoe to the switch controlling the hall-light and extinguished that also. Then he listened again. The servants' quarters were probably situated at the back of the house and almost certainly possessed a stair of their own. He began to ascend the main stair, stopping at every step to strain his ears. When he came to the bend in the staircase he lighted his electric torch.

The landing at the top of the stairs was a wide one and many doors opened from it. He tried several of these doors in succession without finding what he wanted. Then he came to a locked door. So Alaister had taken the precaution of securing his cast from any possible scrutiny. He opened the door next to the locked door and entered the room to which it belonged . . . a bedroom furnished in mahogany, unthriftily splendid. The beam of his torch touched the various pieces of the furniture. This was the real Dudley Titling. He crossed the room to a door which evidently led directly into the locked dressing-room. But that door also was locked, though the key remained in the lock.

He sat down in a big arm-chair and rested his head in his hands. It would be easy enough, probably, to break open one of these doors. But if he did that the servants would be sure to hear him and their intervention would be ruinous to his hopes of examining the cast before Alaister arrived. In his present weak state, on the other hand, he was

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no match for so powerfully built a man as Alaister.

He rose and walked to the window. He raised the blind and looked out and then he opened the window. He could touch the sill of the dressing-room window quite easily, merely by extending his arm. So that from the one sill to the other was only a step.

Very cautiously he raised the window to its fullest height. The street, so far as he could see, was empty. All the windows, too, were dark. He got a chair and set it beside the window. He climbed on the chair and then, grasping the sash of the window with both his hands, stepped out on the sill. For a single dreadful moment he felt that he must lose his balance and be hurled to the street below. But that sense of weakness passed. He took firm hold of the brickwork of the window with his right hand while he stretched out his left hand to the dressing-room window. Then he moved his left foot slowly and carefully across the gap between the two sills. A moment later he was standing before the dressing-room window.

The blind had not been drawn. He glanced again up and down the street and then took his torch from his pocket. He flashed his torch into the room. Close beside him, standing against the wall, was a huge package done up in sackcloth.

That sight, the confirmation of his observations and deductions, gave him a thrill of satisfaction. But the feeling passed as quickly as it had come. He had no reasonable doubt now that Raoul Featherstone's body was encased in that huge mass of plaster; but a nature, which in some respects was strangely weak, recoiled nevertheless from the

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discovery. The finding of this body must inevitably involve both Alaister and Echo Wildermere in tragedy, and he wished evil to neither of them.

If he left the house at once before Alaister's arrival, Featherstone's body would probably never be found. And in the absence of Featherstone's body, the police would scarcely dare to prefer a charge, whatever suspicions they might entertain.

For the first time in his experience Dr. Hailey felt himself placed in the position of a jury called upon to try the issue of life or death. If he forced this window, it was probable that an accusation of murder would follow. It was probable, even, that the sudden impulse of a high-spirited girl to strike down a bully would be punished on the scaffold. . . . For Law and Justice are not the same thing. . . .

On the other hand it is the duty of every citizen to assist in every way the detection and punishment of crime . . . and there can be no discharge from that duty.

Almost unconsciously the doctor's hands sought the sash of the window. He pressed his thumbs on the sash to raise it but it resisted his pressure. He slipped his hand into his pocket and took out a knife. He opened the knife and pushed its blade between the window-sashes; he worked the blade against the spring catch which secured the upper to the lower sash.

The catch resisted his efforts.

And just then the sound of an approaching car came to his ears.

CHAPTER XXVI

A PRISONER

DR. HAILEY strained on the blade of the knife and it snapped off close to the handle.

He heard the car stop. He glanced down and saw Alaister cross the pavement to the front door. A faint sound of a key being inserted in a lock came to his ears. He waited an instant. Alaister had not closed the front door behind him.

Should he smash the window? It was a plate-glass window and might inflict severe injury on him. And even if he did succeed in entering the room Alaister must discover him there. Alaister would fight like a tiger. . . . He stretched out his arm and grasped the side of the window by which he had emerged from the house. He stepped back from sill to sill and re-entered Dudley Titling's bedroom. . . .

Alaister was coming up the stair quite slowly, in the manner of a man who has ample time at his disposal. The doctor crossed the bedroom and took up a position from which he could command a view of the dressing-room door. He heard the sculptor arrive at the door and then fit the key into the lock. A moment later the dressing-room was illuminated.

Dr. Hailey moved forward. He saw Alaister standing in the dressing-room beside his big cast, preparing to lift it. Alaister's face was calm with the

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calmness of complete assurance. Again the sense of being charged with a heavy responsibility assailed the doctor.

The sculptor lifted the cast and came with it to the door of the room. He set it down for an instant while he switched out the light. Dr. Hailey caught his breath as new darkness swallowed up the uneasy spectacle. Then he sprang forward and flung himself on the sculptor.

He managed to grasp the cast and tear it away from Alaister's hands. He tried to get back with it to Dudley Titling's bedroom. But before he could execute the intention the landing was again flooded with light. Alaister stood facing him.

Alaister's expression had not lost its tranquillity, nor did the young man betray any considerable surprise.

"So, it's you, is it?" he remarked in cool tones, at the same time taking the precaution to advance towards the bedroom door.

Dr. Hailey did not reply. His mind was busy on the problem whether or not to shout for help and so rouse the servants or to take his chance of concluding this business himself. He decided not to shout because in all probability the servants would take Alaister's side against him.

"What a damned fool you were," Alaister sneered, "to come here alone. But I suppose the silly-ass mistake of that Scotland Yard fellow made you want to go one better. . . . Didn't occur to you, I suppose, that I would lock the doors? . . ." He scowled savagely. "Bright idea to put the cast in a cab and drive up with it just after Biles had drawn a blank. . . . No, you don't. . . ."

A PRISONER

Alaister sprang forward and slammed the bedroom door behind Dr. Hailey. He stood close beside the doctor with his back to the shut door. Insolent contempt for his opponent was imprinted on his face.

"If I tell you that that cast does not contain Featherstone's body, will you believe me?" he demanded.

"No."

"Why not?"

Dr. Hailey did not reply. With a swift movement he thrust out his leg and hooked his foot round the ankles of his antagonist. Alaister went sprawling to the floor. The doctor lifted the cast and flung it down on the floor to shatter it.

But the thick padding of straw around it defeated that intention. The big package rolled unbroken on the carpet. Exhausted by his effort the doctor leaned heavily on the banister which surrounded the staircase. Alaister regained his feet. He opened the bedroom door and then walked back clear of the door. His face was grim.

"If you were a younger man," he said, "I would strike you. As it is I offer you the chance of going into that bedroom. I shall merely lock you in."

His fists were clenched. Dr. Hailey realized that if he refused these terms he would be attacked instantly. In his present weak state he could not hope to last half a minute against so powerful and so desperate an antagonist. And he had failed to prove that Featherstone's body was in fact hidden in the cast. There was nothing now to be gained by further resistance, whereas if he secured a respite for a few minutes he might be able even yet to renew the struggle. He inclined his head.

RED SCAR

"Very well."

He walked into the bedroom. Alaister shut and locked the door behind him. He heard Alaister descending the stairs. He flung the window open and leaned out. A policeman was coming slowly along the street towards the house. Dr. Hailey shouted to him, and he began to run. At the same moment Alaister emerged from the house carrying his huge burden. He saw the policeman and sprang across the pavement to his car. He flung the door of the car open and hurled the cast into it. He set the engine running. Next instant the car lurched forward.

At the same moment the policeman reached the car and sprang on to the running board. Dr. Hailey saw the vehicle swerve wildly. Then he heard the crash of breaking glass. The policeman reeled on his dangerous stance so that it seemed that he must lose his foothold. . . . An exclamation of joy escaped the doctor's lips. Another car was coming along the street. He left the window and ran across the room to the door. He flung his whole weight against the door.

The lock resisted him. He ran to the fender and snatched up the poker. He struck with it on one of the panels of the door. At the first blow the wood began to splinter. He forced the panel from its socket and put his hand through the aperture he had made. Thank God, the key was in the lock.

He rushed down the stairs. . . . A cry escaped his lips. The policeman was lying in the roadway, huddled up. Alaister's car was turning out from the kerb on the opposite side of the street, towards which it had apparently swerved. In another moment . . .

There was a sound of swiftly changing gears. The

A PRISONER

doctor glanced in the direction whence it came, and saw an open car being turned a short distance farther down the street. He ran towards the policeman. Alaister's car swung out into the roadway, gathering speed as it went. The policeman jumped up suddenly, stumbled a few paces and then sank to his knees. . . .

"After him, sir. . . . I'm all right . . ." he ejaculated.

The driver of the open car was beside them. Dr. Hailey turned and sprang into the car. . . .

"For God's sake don't lose sight of him. . . ."

He leaned forward, oppressed by a sudden giddiness.

CHAPTER XXVII

HEADLIGHTS

ALAISTER drove to Park Lane and turned right-handed towards Oxford Street. Before he reached the Marble Arch he glanced behind him. The pursuing car was well in sight.

He judged that it belonged to the small-car type . . . possibly an 11.9. Thank God he had 14 to oppose to it, and knew how to get the maximum out of his horsepower. He cut the corner at the Park gates and ran straight across the open space between the gates and the Marble Arch, so as to enter the Bayswater Road, as close to the kerb as possible. The long, dipping lines of lamps flanked an empty thoroughfare. The muscles of his jaw tightened.

A moment later he leaned forward in his seat and put his hand under the dash-board. His fingers encountered the cock of the petrol tank and the petrol pipe. They closed for an instant over the narrow pipe. Then he leaned back again. The saloon was throbbing now, drumming. Would he be lucky at Notting Hill Gate? . . . Another glance back. . . .

Good God, they were holding their own . . . gaining, if anything. . . .

What a pity he hadn't used violence on the doctor. . . . A single blow. . . . Such a blow as he had struck at the policeman . . . would have spared

HEADLIGHTS

him all this. . . . Damn those horses ! He pressed the button of the klaxon. A shout of fury ; hoofs clattering ; the instant spectacle of great beasts plunging beside him. . . . Clear, by God, and something in hand as well, because it would take a minute at least to pull that team together again, and re-open the roadway. . . .

Notting Hill Gate was deserted, but there was a line of cabs at the kerb in Camden Hill, and cabs were coming out of one of the houses. . . . "Ah, ha, two can play at that game, my boy. . . ." Another glance back. The cab whose wing he had touched was standing where its driver had managed to pull it up. The driver was out in the roadway inspecting the damage. . . . Following car just rounding the corner from Notting Hill. . . . Now for Shepherd's Bush. . . .

Alaister took the road which connects the Oxford Road with Chiswick and the River. He followed the short-cut by Bedford Park. Speedometer 45. Following car losing ground quite definitely. Should he go on right through Bedford Park or turn ? . . . Good Heavens, that was a policeman in the middle of the road. . . . So the taxi-driver had got on the phone, had he ?

"It's no damn good your holding out your hands, my man, because I'm not going to stop. . . . Ah, splendid. . . . Now whistle away to your heart's content. . . ."

He took the Bedford Park route to Gunnersbury Avenue and then swung left. A moment later the Brentford By-pass opened before him, wide and dark, in spite of its lighthouses. The needle of the speedometer shuddered between fifty and fifty-five. . . .

RED SCAR

Nothing behind. How damn funny if the policeman had held up the other car !

Again he leaned forward and again his fingers caressed the slim petrol pipe. . . . Not yet. . . . He settled himself at the wheel and felt in his pocket for his pipe. . . . No, he couldn't light a pipe, but he had some cigarettes somewhere. . . . He opened the case and spilled its contents. He retrieved one of the cigarettes. When the match flared up, the car swerved badly, and very nearly fouled one of the lighthouses. But how blessed the cigarette was. . . . He would just have time, and no more, if he could maintain this pace for another eight or nine miles. . . . And then let them find what they could find. . . .

The road gleamed before him, smooth as the surface of a deep river. Far away on the road he saw the white glare of headlamps, like silver arrows thrust into the bosom of night. The red lamps of the lighthouses fluttered in dim distances. And against the glare of his own headlights the steady bonnet of the car. He trod the accelerator hard down and saw the speedometer needle register sixty. . . . He started. The gleam of following headlights had flashed suddenly on his wind-screen.

He bent forward over his wheel so that the gleam might not distract him. But those pitiless eyes found him again in his darkness. They held him. He put out his hand and pulled the cord which blinded the rear window. It was out of action and sagged, wretchedly, in his grasp. The blazing eyes played on his screen like summer lightning.

"They're gaining. . . ."

He shouted this discovery twice. He glanced at the quivering needle and saw it touching the sixty

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mark like a feverish antenna, touching and losing, and touching again. He was getting the maximum out of her and it was not enough.

"Oh, *damn* those lights. . . ."

Rage possessed him suddenly. Rage against the lights, against those who had kindled them . . . against Raoul Featherstone. . . . Rage, too, against Echo. In the name of Heaven why had Echo engaged herself to that fellow? . . . He began to shout with the maddening lights dancing in his eyes. He knew why Echo had engaged herself to Featherstone. He knew, by Heaven, he knew. It was her greed of sensation. . . . A pretty boy. . . . Kisses. . . .

The car swerved, plunging into blessed darkness. He hated Echo with Featherstone's kisses on her lips. . . .

He sat up and once more met the full glare. Undoubtedly they were gaining on him. But he had something in hand even yet . . . half a mile, perhaps. . . . At this speed, they would not dare. . . .

Ah, the lights were moving to the off-side. Steady now. . . . He drew his hand over his eyes. He watched the lights appear in his driving mirror, one and then two. . . . The road before him cleared like a focused glass. He strained his ears to catch the first sound of the pursuit. . . . Queer how his rage had passed now that the lights tormented his eyes no longer! And his jealousy along with his rage. It was his own fault that Echo had got engaged to Featherstone. . . . If he had not kept her waiting so long. . . . Now he *could* hear them. . . .

"Come on . . . get past! . . . Echo. Echo,

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Echo, it's that bad streak in you that gets me, do you know. Whereas Featherstone mistook you for a fool.

"He deceiving,
She believing,
What can woman ask for more?
What can woman ask for more?
What can woman. . . .?"

The lights crept close and they were full of anger. Anger, too, roared and rushed in the shadow behind the lights.

So they were going to pass and block the roadway in front. Alaister glanced again at the needle . . . Sixty. They would have to lead by half a mile before they dared, anyhow.

Neck and neck now. . . . Bus was a 20 . . . big American. Doing sixty-five. . . . Seventy perhaps. . . .

"He deceiving,
She believing. . . .
She deceiving. . . ."

His lights caught the car's bonnet and ran along its flanks. Dr. Hailey was looking back. . . . Kindly sort of face he had. . . . It was a pity they hadn't met in better circumstances.

Alaister raised his foot from the accelerator and transferred it to the brake. The car shuddered to a standstill. He bent down and put his hand under the dash-board. He grasped the petrol pipe and tore it from its seating in the tank. A gush of petrol followed his hand.

He descended from the car and struck a match. He tossed the lighted match into the vehicle. . . .

Then he walked out of the red glare, across the road

HEADLIGHTS

to the shadow and took his pipe from his pocket. In spite of the glare he could see the tail lamp of the other car, a mile or so away.

He thought that the other car had been brought to a standstill.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A VERY FOOLISH IDEA

WHEN he realized that Alaister was pulling up, Dr. Hailey remembered the petrol tins which he had seen in the car at Hampstead. A grim expression came upon his features.

That expression had not entirely disappeared when the car was turned. The young man, who had put himself at the doctor's disposal for this adventure, observed it. As they neared the blazing car he glanced again at his companion. The first impression he had had of Dr. Hailey, an impression of mere benevolence, was effaced.

"Won't be much left, after that, eh?" he remarked. "You must confess it's an original sort of idea."

"It's an exceedingly foolish idea."

"What, you don't mean to say that anything short of a lump of iron could withstand that heat? . . ."

The car came to a standstill. Dr. Hailey got out and held up his hands to shield his face. Alaister's car was spouting flame like a whale. Tall columns of flame quivered and fell and rose again above it. The air was full of fire and heat.

"Good evening, my dear doctor."

Dr. Hailey turned to see Alaister standing beside him. As he turned the sculptor took his pipe out of his mouth.

A VERY FOOLISH IDEA

"Don't happen to carry an extinguisher, do you?" he asked.

"No, sir."

Alaister glanced at the young man who had answered him and met a pair of wonder-struck eyes, eyes which admired rather than condemned.

"In that case I'm afraid I must ask for a lift back to town. I take it that you are going back to town?"

The boy glanced at Dr. Hailey before he replied. When he saw the doctor nod, he replied affirmatively. Dr. Hailey still had his hand before his eyes. He was trying to watch the burning car between his fingers.

"This end-up doesn't alter the fact that you won the race," Alaister remarked. "Although I'm bound to say your headlights upset me a good deal. . . . I was doing sixty after Chiswick."

"Oh, we were doing sixty-five. . . . She's a twenty-thirty, you see."

Dr. Hailey turned away from the fire and walked towards the car, leaving Alaister and the boy together. He entered the car and sat down, and then helped himself to a pinch of snuff. He was not sure whether he ought to stay beside Alaister's car till Biles, whom the boy had promised to summon, arrived, or whether he had better go back to London. He closed his eyes. . . .

"Doctor. . . ."

He woke up with a start. The glare of the fire showed him Alaister and the boy standing beside him. But he could not distinguish their features. He turned his head. Alaister's car had emerged from the flames, a heap of twisted iron, like a bunch of snakes. . . . The flames lapped it.

"Have I slept long?"

RED SCAR

"Half an hour."

Alaister and the boy seemed to be on good terms with one another. Alaister opened one of the doors of the car and got in behind. The boy took the wheel.

"Where shall I take you?" he asked Dr. Hailey.

"To Harley Street. . . . No. 22."

Dr. Hailey fell asleep again as soon as the car started. But when the car stopped at his own door he was wide awake. He thanked the boy in earnest tones, and then bade Alaister "Good morning." He opened his door and hurried to his telephone. An hour later Biles stepped out of a big Daimler car at his door. . . .

Dawn was grey in the sky when they turned into Oxford Street. . . . One of those cold London dawns which makes the spectacle of the huddled figures on the seats around Hyde Park so pitiful. Dr. Hailey finished telling his story and lay back on the cushions. He could see the detective's hard profile as a shadow against the window. . . .

"Surely everything must have been burned in such a furnace, my dear Hailey. . . ."

"Oh, no, I don't think so, for a moment."

It was broad day when they drew up at the fire-station at Chiswick. Biles descended and rang the alarm bell. He told the man who answered his summons who he was.

"Can you send a salvage car now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. The car's on the Staines Road, about a mile beyond the Bath Road."

They continued their journey. As they crossed the Bath Road Biles pointed to a thin wisp of smoke rising into the air in front of them. . . .

A VERY FOOLISH IDEA

"Still burning. What a pity you didn't think of sending the fire-engine down on your way up to London."

"I did think of it. It wouldn't have done any good. That smoke proves, doesn't it, that there is something left, even yet, to consume."

The car stopped and both men descended. Alaister's car was still recognizable, and it was still hot enough to prevent a near approach. Acrid smoke filled their nostrils.

"How do you suppose he set it on fire?" Biles asked.

"By tearing out the petrol pipe. It's an old trick which has the merit of being safe ; because, of course, the fire would melt the solder, with which the pipe is fixed, in any case."

"So we can't prove that the fire wasn't an accident?"

"Probably not."

They heard far away the clang of a bell.

"I suggest," Dr. Hailey said, "that the whole of the ashes be collected in the presence of ourselves as witnesses and taken direct to Scotland Yard. The task of examining them is likely to be a long and difficult one."

CHAPTER XXIX

A WEDDING RING

DR. HAILEY pressed the last piece of charred bone into the big sheet of wax in front of him, and then rose to his feet. He stood surveying his work with critical attention.

The door of the room opened and he heard Biles's voice. But he did not turn his head. The detective came and stood beside him.

"You've got nearly the whole skeleton."

"Yes. I warned you that bone is the most difficult of all things to dispose of in a hurry, and the easiest of all things to recognize. . . . if one knows one's anatomy. From a single fossil bone, remember, an entire animal has been reconstructed."

Dr. Hailey's eyes had not, for an instant, been removed from the charred bones while he was speaking. He bent forward suddenly and raised one of the vertebræ out of the wax. He placed it further up the spinal column. Then he filled the space which had been left vacant by a vertebræ taken from above.

"A young skeleton, certainly," he stated. "Look at those long bones. Charred and disfigured as they are, they possess all the elements of youth. But they are small bones, slight bones."

"Quite. Featherstone, by all accounts, was almost girlish in his build."

A WEDDING RING

Biles's voice thrilled. The man-hunter had found his scent. This spectacle of the black bones set in the white wax, the distorted skull, the shrivelled shoulder-blades, the twisted shafts, so macabre, so terrifying even, left him unmoved. The skeleton, so far as he was concerned, was a clue. That and nothing more. He walked away from it to the fireplace and took his pipe out of his pocket. He stood watching a string of great laden barges being towed up-river on the flood tide.

"I fancy," he remarked, "that you have added a fresh specimen to the Black Museum, my dear Hailey. I must congratulate you on an admirable piece of work. . . ."

His tones suggested that he was contemplating already the effect of the charred skeleton on a jury. Dr. Hailey heard the "zip" of a match. The clanging of the tramway cars on the Embankment made a background for that sharp, confident sound. Scotland Yard was making ready to strike. The doctor's eyes grew melancholy as he reflected that the direct responsibility lay, in this case, on himself. For what was to come he, and he alone, was accountable, seeing that it had lain in his power to leave Alaister undisturbed.

"Do you suppose," Biles asked, "that the fact that the body was encased in plaster saved it to some extent from the heat?"

"Oh, no. Plaster of paris soon cracks and powders when it is exposed to flame. There are small pieces of the cast among the ashes, of course, but they aren't even recognizable as such."

"So that if Diarmid had burnt his car out in some quiet country lane, as he evidently meant to do,

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there would have been nothing to show what he had in it—I mean, granting that nobody thought of having the ashes examined by a doctor?"

"Nothing."

Biles smoked for a moment in silence.

"I've sent for Williamson," he announced, "to make the official examination of the bones. Do you wish to meet him particularly?"

"Not particularly. I flatter myself that my knowledge of anatomy will not be found wanting, even if I do not remain to vindicate it. . . ."

"Good, we can go to Hampstead. The time has come, I think, to persuade Miss Echo Wildermere that obedience to Diarmid is the wrong policy in her case."

Again the note of triumph sounded in the detective's voice. His experience of the previous evening had left, apparently, a sense of injured professional pride. The official, be he great or small, forgets nothing and forgives nothing . . . in his official capacity. Dr. Hailey sighed. He picked up two blackened objects from the table and held them out to his companion.

"Before we go to Hampstead," he said, "I think that it would be well, my dear Biles, if you looked at these things. They appear to be pieces of jewellery. The metal, in one instance, has run."

"Jewellery?" Biles's small eyes widened. He received the pieces and walked with them to the window.

"The piece that is intact," the doctor added, "was evidently a plated brooch or buckle. I haven't been able to decide finally what the other piece was. . . ."

He watched Biles and saw a shadow of annoyance

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fall on his face. The detective took a lens from his pocket and focused it on the objects in his hand.

"A brooch, certainly. Cheap rubbish set with some sort of stones. This other piece is gold, I think."

"Undoubtedly. I thought at first it had been a small pendant ; but I am inclined to believe now that it was a ring."

"It may have been anything." Biles brought the trinkets back and laid them on the table. "Probably they were in one of the pockets of the car," he suggested.

"Now look at this. . . ." Dr. Hailey picked up a small chain with large open links. "You know what this is, of course ?"

"I don't."

"Why, my dear Biles, every second woman, nowadays, uses one of these chains to fasten her cloak at the neck. The links are covered with silk, as a rule."

Suddenly the detective's face cleared :

"Of course, just before he left to go to Colonel Titling's house for his cast Diarmid had had Mrs. Leyland as a passenger in his car. That buckle . . ."

"On the contrary, she was wearing her cloak when she arrived at the house. . . ."

Biles frowned. "Yes, I remember now. Still some other woman may have left her cloak in the car. Echo Wildermere, for example."

"Oh, no. You forget that I looked into the car myself a few minutes before Alaister Diarmid drove away. There was nothing in the car then but petrol and plaster-dust."

Dr. Hailey paused. It was obvious that he had more to say. The detective remained silent.

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"You see, my dear Biles, these chains are used on cloaks . . . the kind of cloaks women wear over evening dress . . . the kind of cloak which Miss Echo Wildermere may very well have been wearing if and when she visited Raoul Featherstone on the night of his disappearance. . . . Let us suppose that this cloak was made of white material and that it became stained with blood. . . ."

Again the doctor paused.

"Well?"

"In that case is it not a possibility . . . I put it no higher than that . . . that Alaster Diarmid may have hidden the cloak also in his cast? After all, he was engaged in making the cast at the time when, perhaps, the cloak became bloodstained. It was late at night and his fire probably was out. So it would be a difficult matter to burn it. And he couldn't possibly take the risk of hiding it seeing that it was damning evidence against the woman he loved."

Biles nodded approvingly.

"That's it, of course. The buckle was on the cloak."

"Possibly. But not the ring. The ring, my dear Biles, is the one inexplicable fact in this case."

Dr. Hailey's face had lost its habitual expression of aloofness. He leaned forward towards his companion.

"It is possible, but not probable, that Phyllis Leyland dropped a ring in the car. She was wearing only two rings, her wedding-ring and a 'keeper', when she came to Featherstone's studio. I distinctly remember that because I saw her hands reaching out in the beam of her electric torch to take the pieces

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of her husband's walking-stick from the table. I think I should have noticed if either of those rings had been missing when you talked to her in Diarmid's house. Echo Wildermere, just before Diarmid drove away, was wearing the engagement ring which Featherstone gave her. I wondered why she continued to wear it."

He paused. The eagerness in his eyes had not abated.

"Still," Biles said, "rings are often dropped, you know. If it really is a ring it may have been lying unnoticed in the car for days . . . weeks."

"Rings are not often dropped. Ask the people who deal with lost property, and they will tell you that they very seldom receive rings, and that when rings are lost the loser is usually a man and not a woman. Almost all the instances in which women lose their rings occur when the rings have been taken off deliberately."

Biles shrugged his shoulders.

"It sounds like psychoanalysis, my dear Hailey."

"It is psychoanalysis. The conclusion to be drawn is that this ring was not dropped in Diarmid's car. How, then, did it find its way into his car? Remember that I used my electric torch to examine the car."

"I don't know."

Dr. Hailey fixed his eyeglass in his eye.

"My own idea is that it was enclosed in the cast, with Echo Wildermere's cloak. What I want to discover is why Echo Wildermere was carrying a ring, a plain gold ring, in the pocket of her cloak."

He spoke these last words significantly. The detective started.

RED SCAR

"Good Heavens, you don't mean that it was a wedding-ring?"

"I think it was a wedding-ring. Look at it. It is quite smooth. There is not even the suggestion of a setting, and it seems to have been of uniform width. It was that fact which made me think at first that it might have been a pendant."

Biles picked up the ring and began to rub it with his handkerchief. Then he walked to a cupboard in the room, which seemed to be full of the apparatus of cleansing, and took out a small tin of metal polish and a leather. He spent a few minutes in restoring the brightness of the metal while the doctor helped himself to snuff.

"I believe you're right. I'll have it examined by our jewellery expert at once." The detective raised his head sharply. "If Miss Echo Wildermere was in fact Featherstone's wife, then the case against Alaister Diarmid is complete."

Again the look of triumph gleamed in his eyes. Dr. Hailey closed his snuff-box with a snap.

"I have never yet," he said in gentle tones, "known or heard of any woman who omitted to wear the wedding-ring to which she was legally entitled. I do not believe that Miss Wildermere was married to Featherstone."

"Have you ever known a woman who carried a wedding-ring in her pocket without being married?"

"A number of women do that. . . ."

"Um. But there was nothing to prevent Featherstone from marrying this girl. They had no need to pretend to be married."

"Exactly, my dear Biles. That, if I may say so, is where the mystery begins in this case. Echo

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Wildermere was engaged to Featherstone. Featherstone had bought her a valuable engagement ring, which she was wearing. He was apparently very anxious to marry her, and both of them were in a position to get married. And yet she, and not he, had possession of a wedding-ring which she did not care or dare to place on her finger."

CHAPTER XXX

ANDROMEDA

THE very manner in which Biles instructed his cabman proclaimed his belief that the "Hampstead Mystery", as the morning papers had called it, was solved. When the cab started he sat back and crossed his long legs.

"I propose," he stated, "to examine Miss Wildermere first, and then charge Alaister Diarmid with the actual murder. The girl was an accessory both before and after the fact."

His tones were positive, and yet they conveyed a challenge. Dr. Hailey contracted his brows.

"If Alaister Diarmid killed Featherstone," he asked, "why did he take such great care to shield Echo Wildermere from suspicion . . . even to the extent of accusing himself in the end when every other means of saving her from suspicion had failed?"

"I suppose because he was in love with her. He makes no secret of being in love with her. Besides, the girl, as I think, saw him stab Featherstone. In the first instance he was probably concerned to prevent her from being compelled to answer any awkward questions."

"In that case, if we are to believe Phyllis Leyland's story, Alaister Diarmid and Echo Wildermere must

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have been in hiding during Phyllis Leyland's visit to the studio. . . ."

"Quite. Mrs. Leyland saw a woman, if you remember, as she was coming to the studio door, running away across Diarmid's lawn. Diarmid tried to persuade me that it was himself whom she saw . . . only himself. Probably he was behind the wall at that moment."

Dr. Hailey sighed. "I have only two facts to set against your conclusions," he stated, "and I confess that both of them are isolated and unrelated to any of the other facts in the case. The one is the wedding-ring; the other is the glass stopper of the poison bottle which I picked up in the studio. The wedding-ring suggests to me that there is an undiscovered element in the case as it affects Echo Wildermere. I have, as yet, no suggestion at all to make about the stopper. Nevertheless I can't help feeling that both these pieces of evidence demand investigation."

Biles did not reply. He had got his case, and was scarcely even interested in facts which did not immediately support it. Biles, the doctor reflected, belonged to that large group of men and women who use science, and the methods of science, as a means to an end and not as ends in themselves. He habitually began his work with a theory of the case, and then looked about for proofs of that theory, whereas the true man of science begins with an empty mind and collects his evidence without caring in the least to what conclusions it may lead him. Biles's method was the immemorial method of folklore and magic, of credulity which seeks to bolster up its belief by an imposing array of "facts and figures"; the method of science is the method of

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doubt, for science is not concerned to believe anything or to prove anything—not even to disprove anything. There flashed into the doctor's mind the thought of all the blessings which this method of doubt has given to humanity—modern surgery, modern hygiene, the prevention of disease, the lengthening of life, pure food, pure water, and the greater blessing of freedom from superstition and the oppression which is always associated with superstition. What had the method of credulity ever bestowed on men and women except injustice and misery?

The cab reached Hampstead Village and began to climb Holly Hill. Dr. Hailey's eyes sought the National Institute of Medical Research which stands on the top of the hill. A new temple of a new faith, faith in honest doubt. He thought of all the small, careful, patient researches being carried on, day by day, and even night by night, within these red walls to win from reluctant Nature a single grain of truth, and his pulses were quickened. There was the real romance, the true progress, the sure promise of a happier and a better world. From these doors had come forth, and would continue to come forth, help and healing not for the British people only but for all peoples and all races, for humanity itself.

The cab stopped, and Biles jumped out and handed the driver his fare, which he had counted out in readiness. Before Dr. Hailey had descended to the pavement the door of the little old-world house had been opened.

"Mrs. Wildermere?"

"Yes."

They passed into the dimness of a tiny entrance hall in which oak beams were deliciously mingled

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with old brick. A moment later they emerged into a sunny room, the windows of which were framed in scarlet leaves. Mrs. Wildermere raised frightened eyes to the detective's face.

"What can I do for you?" she asked anxiously.

She was a woman who had worn her young beauty almost threadbare without losing it, a timid woman, Dr. Hailey thought, not so much by nature as from force of circumstances. He tried to discover her daughter's vigour of mind and body in her expression, and failed to discover it. But Mrs. Wildermere had not left Echo unendowed. The girl had derived from her mother those pleasure-haunted lips of which Alaister had made such memorable use in his statue of Andromeda.

"Is Miss Wildermere at home?"

"Oh, yes." Mrs. Wildermere hesitated. She moved towards the open door of the room, and then returned again to Biles.

"My daughter is lying down; she was so tired after sitting up last night with a sick friend."

The woman's hands clasped each other, making the diamonds on the very beautiful rings which she wore flash insolently. Her eyes pleaded for respite with the unreasoning hope of a debtor whose last credits are exhausted.

Biles told her that he regretted that his business could not wait, and she left the room immediately. She closed the door softly behind her. Dr. Hailey sat down and glanced round the little room. Its panelled walls were covered with paint of a rich cream colour which was fresh without being assertive. There were no pictures on the walls, but the covers of the chairs were very bright—a design which

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incorporated every tint of autumn. The room had comfort without indulgence ; one might be glad in it but not, perhaps, contented, unless the sun was shining. The big basin-like lamp-shade of pink silk bordered with black which hung in the centre of the room seemed to be its most characteristic furnishing. . . .

The lamp-shade began to sway on its silken cords. The doctor turned sharply to see Echo standing in the open doorway.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Hailey. Good afternoon, Inspector Biles."

Echo closed the door and came across the room to where Biles was standing. Dr. Hailey had a swift impression of courage and self-possession only a little tempered by nervousness. The girl's cheeks were bright, but she was slightly pale round the lips.

"More questions?" she asked with just a trace of resentment in her tones.

Biles had assumed his most inquisitorial manner. To intensify that effect of gravity, he took his note-book from his pocket and requested the girl to be seated. He opened his note-book with deliberation.

"I'm afraid I must ask you some further questions, yes," he said, "and I hope that, in view of what has happened, you will no longer put any difficulties in my way by refusing to answer them." He fixed his eyes on Echo's face. "The body of Mr. Raoul Featherstone," he declared, "has just been found. It was encased in the cast of Mr. Alaister Diarmid's statue of yourself."

He paused to give his disclosure its fullest effect. Echo did not flinch.

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"There can be no doubt that Mr. Diarmid himself concealed the body in the cast."

Again Biles paused. They heard a messenger-boy go whistling past the windows down Holly Hill.

"There was also found in the cast a metal chain belonging, evidently, to a woman's evening cloak. . . . I may say that Mr. Diarmid attempted to burn the cast and that everything other than metal . . . and bone . . . which it contained, was destroyed."

The words "and bone" were spoken in the tones of a judge pronouncing sentence, but still the effect on the girl to whom they were spoken was considerable. Echo pulled her chair up to the table so that she faced the window and Dr. Hailey rather than the detective. She rested her forearms on the table and clasped her hands together. The doctor noticed that she was no longer wearing Raoul's engagement ring.

"I knew," she stated, "that Alaister had got rid of my cloak somehow, though I didn't know that he had put it in the cast."

Her voice was steady, but it conveyed nevertheless a sense of tension. She was waiting and watching.

"So you admit that the cloak belonged to you?"

"Oh, yes."

"And the buckle with which the chain was fastened?"

"The buckle was on my hat, not on my cloak. . . . My hat was stained with blood as well as my cloak."

Biles started slightly, in spite of himself. He began to make a note and then, suddenly, closed his note-book.

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"Will you please tell me," he demanded, "exactly what happened during your visit to Mr. Featherstone's studio on the last night of that unhappy young man's life?"

Echo nodded in the manner of a person who is preoccupied and does not wish, for the moment, to be disturbed. Then she repeated the story which she had told Alaister. When she finished Biles reopened his note-book.

"Have you any idea why Mr. Featherstone should have attacked you?" he asked.

"Of course not."

"Was he lying down or standing up when you entered the studio?"

"He was leaning against the wall. All his shirt-front was streaked with blood. . . ."

"And when he saw you, he sprang at you?"

"No, it didn't happen like that." Echo fixed her eyes on her outstretched hands, as if she had discovered something in her hands which perplexed her. "When I came into the studio Raoul didn't seem to recognize me at first. He didn't even seem to see me. I got a pretty bad shock, but I think I managed to keep my head. I ran to him and put my arms round him. . . ."

"And then he attacked you?"

"No, not even then. He leaned against me for a minute or two. It was only when I called to him that he suddenly gathered new strength and began to tear my frock. . . . He scratched my shoulders, but otherwise he didn't hurt me much. But I was very frightened."

"Did you defend yourself?"

"I don't really know what I did. I suppose I tried

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to get away from him. All of a sudden he fell down, full length, on the floor. I thought he was dead. . . ."

Biles made an entry in his book.

"What did you call to him?" Dr. Hailey asked.

"Only his name—Raoul. I must have called it three or four times before he got violent. . . . I was trying to rouse him from his stupor."

"And after that you summoned Mr. Alaister Diarmid?" Biles put the question as though he attached no importance to it.

"Oh, no. I wrapped my cloak round his neck first to stop the bleeding. My hat fell off while I was kneeling down; it fell right on to the wound."

Echo's face grew paler as she spoke. She grasped the edge of the table, but Biles did not observe these signs.

"You consented, I understand, the next morning when Diarmid told Dr. Hailey that you were engaged to him?" he asked in rasping tones.

"Yes."

"May I ask how you explain these . . . these extraordinary proceedings?"

"I suppose that I was in love with Alaister from the beginning."

"Hm, I see. You had engaged yourself to Featherstone in order to make Diarmid declare his love to you? Is that it?"

Echo shook her head. "I don't think anything is quite so simple as that, Inspector Biles."

"You don't deny that you did engage yourself to Featherstone, do you?"

"Of course not."

"Nor that, when you told Diarmid about your engagement, he announced that he was in love with

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you himself? We have the independent testimony of Major Lionel Leyland, I may say, about that."

"No, I don't deny that either."

Biles thrust his head forward.

"From the moment when Diarmid declared himself, you were finished with Featherstone, eh?"

"I knew then that I had made a mistake in becoming engaged to Raoul."

"And yet you allowed Featherstone to buy you a valuable engagement ring that same afternoon?"

"Yes."

"And told him nothing about your change of feeling?"

Echo struck the table sharply with the points of her fingers.

"I don't think," she said, "that your way of looking at things, Inspector Biles, and my way of looking at things are the same. I'm not inhuman, exactly. Naturally I was terribly sorry and upset when I realized that I didn't care for Raoul so much as I had thought that I cared. It seemed to be my duty almost to marry him in spite of my feelings.

. . . When I left Alaister's house I made up my mind to keep my promise. I met Raoul in town and allowed him to buy the ring as he had arranged. It was when I was waiting at home afterwards for him to take me out that I knew that I couldn't keep my promise. I meant to tell him that evening that I must break off our engagement, and that was really why I went to his studio when he didn't come to me. I felt I couldn't wait till the next day."

"I see." Again Biles thrust his face forward. "Suppose," he demanded, "that Featherstone had refused to release you from your promise?"

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"How absurd ! Of course, he wouldn't have refused."

"I said, 'Suppose that he had refused ?' "

"If he had refused I should have broken off the engagement just the same. I had made up my mind to break it off."

The detective made a long note. Then he asked :

"You realized, of course, that Featherstone had been wounded ? I mean, that his injury was not due to an accident ?"

"Yes."

"Whom did you suspect of having inflicted that wound ?"

"I didn't think of anybody at the time."

"Did you think of anybody afterwards ?"

"Perhaps I did."

"Mrs. Leyland ?"

"I knew she had been very friendly with Raoul."

"And that her husband was sure to tell her about your engagement to him ?"

"Yes, I did think it was likely he would tell her." Again Echo tapped on the table. "I don't want you to go away with the idea that I ever really suspected Phyllis," she added. "I merely thought of her. I feel quite sure now that Phyllis would never wound anybody."

"Did you think about Diarmid in the same way ?"

Echo stiffened in her chair. Dr. Hailey saw her knuckles blanch as she clenched her fists.

"Of course not. Would I have gone to him for help if I had ?"

Biles frowned slightly.

"What was Diarmid doing when you reached his house ?" he asked.

"I think he was making a new cast of his statue."

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... The housemaid in the afternoon broke the first cast he had made."

"Did you tell him, then, that you had been going to break off your engagement to Featherstone?"

"Oh, no, I begged him to come to the studio. I was much too frightened to think about anything else. . . ."

"And yet you allowed him to drive you home before Featherstone's wound was attended to?"

For the first time Echo seemed ill at ease.

"Yes, I allowed him," she agreed.

"Did you tell him on the way home about the engagement?"

"No, I didn't ; I haven't told him yet."

Biles made a final note and closed his book.

"I'm going to be perfectly frank with you," he stated. "I think your story is unsatisfactory. Why, for example, should the man you are engaged to attack you? On the face of it, it's an extremely improbable occurrence. . . ."

Echo rose to her feet. "If you wait a moment," she said, "I'll show you the frock I was wearing last night."

She left the room. Biles turned to Dr. Hailey.

"What do you think?"

"It struck me that she was speaking the truth. She volunteered the information that the chain belonged to her cloak."

"But why should Featherstone have attacked her?"

"I don't know."

Echo returned, carrying a green frock of the colour of olives. She held it up for the detective's inspection. One of the shoulder-straps was torn across, and

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there was a second tear at the neck. The white lace with which the frock was trimmed was bespattered.

"You see that I was attacked," she stated.

"No doubt; but how? When?" Biles's eyes narrowed, and his voice became rasping again. "I put it to you, you visited Featherstone last night to break off your engagement and did, in fact, break off your engagement."

He paused. Echo had laid her frock over the back of a chair and was facing him with parted lips. . . .

"And that he refused to release me," she cried, "and that after that he became violent and tore my frock. And then, of course, I snatched up a knife and stabbed him in the neck. It is all so simple and so obvious, Inspector Biles, isn't it?"

Her cheeks were flaming. Andromeda, Alaister's Andromeda, Dr. Hailey thought, like Galatea, had come to life.

CHAPTER XXXI

"A GREAT ARTIST"

BILES was unable to hide his astonishment. For an instant, indeed, his eyes expressed admiration as well as surprise. In this attitude of defiance Echo was very lovely.

"That is not my reading of the case," he declared coldly. "I do not think that you wounded Featherstone. I feel sure, on the contrary, that the wound was inflicted by Alaister Diarmid."

"Alaister? How could Alaister have inflicted the wound?"

"He has already confessed that he inflicted it."

The girl winced. For a moment Dr. Hailey thought that she was going to collapse, but her courage sustained her.

"He told you that," she declared in firm tones, "to shield me."

"To shield you?"

"Yes. Alaister thinks that I wounded Raoul."

She was completely master of herself again. Biles drew a sharp breath.

"Why should he think that?"

"Because . . . because he believes that I am capable of . . . of that sort of thing."

She stammered; a deep blush overspread her face. She added:

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"When I came to call him my frock was torn and there was blood on my shoulder."

"I thought that Diarmid was in love with you," Biles said.

"Alaister is a great artist."

The girl spoke the words proudly.

"I don't understand you. What has that got to do with his attitude to yourself?"

"It explains his attitude to me . . . to everything."

Biles sighed. He glanced at Dr. Hailey and raised his eyebrows. To his astonishment he saw that the doctor was leaning forward gazing at Echo with an expression of the deepest interest.

"You mean, I think," Dr. Hailey said, "that Mr. Diarmid never allows his feelings to run away with his judgement."

"Yes. And his judgement, you see, is against me both on the facts themselves as he knows them and on his reading of my character."

Again Echo blushed. The doctor turned away to avoid causing her great embarrassment.

"His statue of Andromeda," he said in low tones.

"Exactly. His statue is his reading of my character. That is what he believes about me. Like you, he can't understand why Raoul should have attacked me."

"In other words," Biles said in sharp tones, "he doesn't believe what you told him."

"He does, and he doesn't. . . . I really can't explain it any better than that. But I understand it."

The detective shrugged his shoulders. His eyes began to gleam again.

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"Why," he asked, "did you carry a wedding-ring in the pocket of your cloak when you went to Featherstone's studio?"

"I didn't."

"A wedding-ring has been found along with the chain and the buckle which you admit belong to you. Either you or Featherstone must have been in possession of the ring."

"I know nothing about it."

"Did Featherstone wear a signet ring?"

"No. He disliked seeing a ring on a man's finger."

"Well, then, did he buy a wedding-ring when he bought your engagement ring?"

"Oh, no; we hadn't even fixed the time of our marriage."

"The ring is there, anyhow." Biles considered a moment and then added: "I am going to suggest, Miss Wildermere, that when you attempted to break off your engagement to him Featherstone lost his head and became violent. No doubt, when he attacked you, you cried for help. I put it to you that your cries brought Diarmid on the scene and that, when he saw how you had been treated, he murdered your lover."

"It is not true."

"Then you heard footsteps approaching the studio and ran away across Diarmid's lawn. When Mrs. Leyland had gone you and Diarmid returned to the studio to find that Featherstone was dead."

They heard footsteps approaching the house. The bell rang loudly.

Dr. Hailey glanced back through the window of the room.

"That's Mr. Diarmid himself," he announced.

CHAPTER XXXII

WILFUL MURDER

ECHO opened the door to Alaister and brought him into the room.

"I've told Inspector Biles exactly what happened," she announced.

The sculptor flung his hat on a chair. He glanced round the room haughtily without seeming to take special notice of the girl.

"What's up?" he asked in his deep husky voice.

He stood, challenging Biles. The detective gave him a brief but very plain-spoken account of all that had happened. When he finished Alaister forced a laugh.

"This business is getting funny!" he exclaimed. "What with skeletons and wedding-rings. . . ."

He broke off and pulled a big silk handkerchief from his pocket. He wiped his brow. Biles had fresh recourse to his note-book.

"Do I understand you to deny that Featherstone's body was encased in your cast?" he asked sharply.

"I'm damned if I know what you understand. It wasn't encased in my cast."

"Then how do you account for the presence of human bones amongst the ashes collected from your burnt-out car?"

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"I don't account for it. Why should I?"

"The bones are there, sir."

"Very well, they're there."

Biles frowned. "You stated that Miss Wildermere did not visit Featherstone's studio on the night of . . . of his disappearance, whereas Miss Wildermere now tells us that she did visit Featherstone's studio on that night."

"Very well, then, I was wrong. She did visit Featherstone's studio."

"Where she was attacked by Featherstone. She ran to your house and summoned you to help her."

The detective paused. His pale face expressed judgement without mercy.

"Have it your own way." Suddenly Alaister raised his head. "It sounds a probable story, doesn't it," he sneered.

"It sounds a most improbable story."

"Then why not believe the story I told you . . . that I wounded Featherstone myself?"

"I feel sure that you wounded him, but I feel equally sure that Miss Wildermere was present, aiding and abetting you, on that occasion."

Alaister sat down at the table and rested his chin on his hands. Dr. Hailey saw his brows contract. He had heard the worst and seemed, now, to be attempting some arrangement in his own mind of the various charges.

"Why, in the name of God," he asked, "should Miss Wildermere aid and abet me to wound her fiancé?"

"Because she had made up her mind that she cared for you and not for Featherstone. She went

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to the studio for the purpose of breaking off her engagement to Featherstone. . . ."

Alaister started slightly.

"Rubbish. . . ."

"Miss Wildermere will tell you that it is true."

Alaister jumped up, casting, as he did so, a side-long glance at Echo, who sat with parted lips and strained features watching him.

"Listen to me!" he cried. "The story which Miss Wildermere has told you is true. My personal feelings towards her urged me to shelter her from any possible suspicion of being concerned in the tragedy and so I insisted on her going home and leaving me to take care of Featherstone. It was these personal feelings which caused me to deny that she had visited the studio. Her visit took place after I had wounded Featherstone, and she had no connection of any sort with my wounding of him. Dr. Hailey will tell you that I had quarrelled violently with Featherstone the night before the wounding."

"I see. So that, having wounded Featherstone, you calmly returned to your house and left him to bleed to death. Is that what you wish me to believe?"

"I didn't think I had hurt him very much."

"And yet, a little later, after Miss Wildermere called you, you bandaged the wound and carried the wounded man across to your house."

"Because, then, I realized that I had hurt him terribly."

Biles raised his shoulders in a contemptuous shrug.

"There is a simpler and a more satisfying explanation of your conduct," he declared, "namely, the

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explanation I have already given you. That explanation, if I may say so, has the merit of explaining the attack by Featherstone on Miss Wildermere, your efforts to wash away the evidences of the crime—in which efforts the police happily surprised you—your plans to prevent the examination of Miss Wildermere, and finally your attempt to dispose of the murdered body of your victim—to say nothing of your accomplice's bloodstained cloak and hat."

As he spoke Biles took a step forward.

"I charge you," he declared, "with the wilful murder of Raoul Featherstone, and I warn you that anything you may say after this will be used in evidence against you."

"You mean, that you arrest me?"

"Yes. And Miss Wildermere."

The detective turned to Echo and repeated his formula, with such amendment as accused her of being "an accessory after the fact".

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DOUBTS OF DR. HAILEY

DR. HAILEY did what he could to comfort and reassure Mrs. Wildermere after Echo and Alaister had been taken away in a cab to the police-station by Biles. The poor woman possessed but little of her daughter's courage; nevertheless, she made a brave effort to control herself. When he left her the doctor went straight home and slept for sixteen consecutive hours.

His mind, when he woke, began instantly to grapple with the problem which had filled it the night before. He understood now why Alaister had believed Echo to be guilty. He realized, too, that such a belief was incompatible with the idea that Alaister himself was the criminal. One does not believe that another person has committed an act which one has oneself committed.

Was Alaister's belief in Echo's guilt genuine, though, or merely assumed?

As he sipped his morning cup of tea he asked himself that question again and again. He tried to recall all the evidence for and against its genuineness which he had been able to collect. One had to remember that, if Biles's view was correct, the sculptor had good reason to wish to keep Echo away from the police. Under cross-examination Echo might betray

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him and herself. On the other hand, he had continued to try to seal Echo's lips long after he had himself confessed to the crime. That might be merely his desire to shield his accomplice, but it might equally well be the outcome of a belief in the girl's guilt. If he had, in fact, stabbed Raoul because Raoul was ill-using Echo, why should he hide Echo's share in the tragedy? A woman who is attacked is entitled to defend herself.

Dr. Hailey drove down to Scotland Yard immediately after breakfast and put this point to Biles. But the detective was in no mood to give it weight.

"That will be their defence, of course," he said. "Diarmid will say that Featherstone was assaulting the girl and that he took the only course open to him to save her."

"He has not said so, yet."

"Of course not. Because the story not being true he has not yet sufficiently collected his wits to think of it as a good explanation of his conduct." The detective smiled grimly. "Our answer will be that a man of Diarmid's build had no need to use a knife against a weakling such as Featherstone, especially as he had the girl to help him. The truth, obviously, is that Diarmid was violently jealous of Featherstone and saw red. Don't forget that Echo Wildermere told us she had not spoken to Diarmid about her change of feeling towards her fiancé. Diarmid believed he had lost the girl to Featherstone."

Dr. Hailey prepared to go away.

"You have had the ring examined?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes; it's a wedding-ring, all right. I fancy we shall have to be content to leave it at that."

THE DOUBTS OF DR. HAILEY

When he returned to Harley Street the doctor told his butler, Jenkins, to bring him the "Post Office Directory". He made a list of the chemist's shops situated within half-a-mile of Raoul's studio. He rang each of them up in turn, gave his name, and asked if a glass stopper had been missed from a poison bottle. The inquiry proved fruitless. Just when he had concluded it Jenkins informed him that Mrs. Leyland had called to see him.

"Show her in, please."

Phyllis's eyes were red and she looked haggard. She seized the doctor's hand and held it for a moment, as if seeking support.

"It's awful, isn't it, about Alaister and Echo?" she whispered. "I felt I must come and see you and ask you to help me. . . ."

She sank into a chair. She allowed her umbrella and handbag to fall on the floor beside her.

"I've taken Lionel home," she added. "The house at Hampstead is shut."

"How is your husband?"

"No better. Dr. Lomond wants you to come and see him again. He says an operation will be necessary to take the piece of bone out of his brain." She raised her tear-stained face. "All these terrible columns in the papers about Alaister have frightened me dreadfully. It looks almost as if he must have done it; and yet I know that he didn't. Is there no way of . . . of saving him?"

"Things look pretty black, I'm afraid."

"If only he hadn't put the body in his cast. That was to shield Echo, of course."

She put out her hand and grasped Dr. Hailey's arm.

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"Do you . . . do you really think that Echo killed Raoul?"

"No."

Phyllis shook her head. "Alaister must have thought that she killed him," she said.

Silence fell in the room. Then Phyllis said :

"It is frightful to think that I am the cause of all this. I feel that I am the one who is really guilty. I feel that I must work and work to save these two, or I can never be happy again. . . ." Once more she grasped the doctor's arm. "Is the operation on Lionel's brain a very dangerous one?"

"It is a serious operation. . . ."

"I know he won't recover . . . I feel it somehow. And then I shall have killed him, too. . . ." She drew herself up. She was as pale as marble. "I shall have killed my husband, my father, Raoul, Alaister, Echo."

Dr. Hailey laid his hand on her shoulder.

"It is foolish," he said, "to talk in that way."

"It's the truth. If I hadn't yielded to my feelings, none of these terrible things could have happened." She covered her face with her hands. "And my feelings were false . . . false. . . . I have never cared for anybody but Lionel in my whole life. Do you know, I was far more upset by the thought that Lionel might have killed Raoul than I was by seeing the knife in Raoul's shoulder."

Dr. Hailey started.

"His shoulder? I understood you to say that the wound was in the neck?"

"It was where the neck joins the shoulder." Phyllis put her hand on the back of her neck. Her fingers rested on a spot a few inches out from the

THE DOUBTS OF DR. HAILEY

spine, at the level of the top of the shoulder-blade.
"It was there."

The doctor rose.

"Was the knife," he asked, "thrust deeply into the wound?"

"About half of the blade was in the wound."

"What!"

"Yes. Only about half of the blade."

"You are quite sure of your facts . . . that the spot you show me is the right spot?"

The girl's expression had changed. Her eyes were fixed on the doctor's face.

"I am absolutely certain."

Dr. Hailey left her and walked to a bookcase. He took a thick blue volume from the shelf and turned its pages so that they rustled. Then he brought the volume to his desk and laid it on the corner of the desk.

"This is Cunningham's 'Practical Anatomy'," he said, "the best book of its kind in the world. Do you see that picture? Very well, take this pencil and put a mark on the exact place where Featherstone's wound was. . . ."

He handed the pencil to Phyllis. She obeyed him unhesitatingly. He turned the page and glanced at the letterpress on the following page.

"There is no vital organ within several inches of the place," he said, "the muscles of the neck and shoulder meet there. It seems to me quite impossible that such a wound could have been fatal . . . even allowing for the loss of blood."

"There was a dreadful loss of blood."

"When you drew out the knife, yes. But such a flow in such a place soon stops." Dr. Hailey replaced

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the volume on his shelf. "The trouble is," he added, "that it is open to the police to suggest that this was not the only wound which Featherstone received. There are no witnesses other than yourself whose testimony is likely to carry any weight."

CHAPTER XXXIV

ACCORDING TO PATTERN

THE operation on Lionel Leyland was successful. A piece of bone, which had been driven into the brain, was removed. Within a week the patient was restored to his normal mind. But that normal mind retained no memory of the terrible events which had followed Raoul Featherstone's blow.

"I can remember seeing Featherstone coming at me with the poker," Lionel Leyland told Dr. Hailey, "but after that everything is a blank."

"You had struck him?"

"Oh, yes. I broke my stick over his shoulders. To do him justice he behaved with more courage than I had expected, but he was half-crazed all the same." The sick man closed his eyes wearily. "I should have taken Alaister's advice and exercised self-restraint."

Dr. Hailey found Phyllis waiting for him in the reception-room of the nursing-home as she had been waiting every day since the operation. He told her that her husband was out of danger, and had his reward in the gleam of happiness which for a moment transformed her pale face, but happiness was quenched the next instant in fear.

"You've seen the morning papers?" she whispered. "The trial is to begin next week."

"Yes."

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"And we have nothing . . . nothing. . . ."

The doctor did not reply. The meetings which he had had with Alaister's legal representatives had discouraged him so profoundly that he did not dare to discuss them. To all his objections the lawyers had made the same answer: people who attempt to dispose of bodies condemn themselves in advance.

He returned home profoundly dejected. The case had been tried already in the newspapers, and the verdict was "guilty". Worse still, articles were appearing on the subject of "Vamps" who lured men to their ruin, articles obviously meant to refer to Echo Wildermere. The public view was that Echo had made use of Raoul to inflame Alaister's passion. Alaister, on the other hand, was looked on as the typical "Cave-Man" who loses all self-control when face to face with a rival. What were the wretched scraps of evidence which he had collected worth against this raging tide of prejudice?

He rang the bell, and when Jenkins answered it asked him for his opinion. The butler shrugged his shoulders.

"Ain't much doubt, sir, is there? By my way of thinkin', it's the old story of a man wot's been driven to distraction by a woman. Gone temp'rary hinsane, 'e 'as. W'en 'e sees the other fella' it's good night."

"Um! I'm not so sure. The fact is, Jenkins, I don't believe that either Diarmid or Miss Wildermere is guilty."

The butler surveyed his master with amazement. But he knew his master's powers as a detective too well to offer any objection.

"'Ow do you make that out, sir?" he asked.

ACCORDING TO PATTERN

Dr. Hailey began to pace the floor of his consulting-room.

"Diarmid," he said, "thinks that Miss Wildermere is guilty." He stopped, and extended his arm in a swift gesture. "He can't be guilty himself, can he, if he thinks that?"

"Not if 'e genuinely thinks it."

"Quite so. Now what about the girl. Can she be guilty, do you suppose?"

"Might 'ave struck 'im if 'e was molestin' 'er."

"Yes, but that isn't murder, you know. A woman is always entitled to defend herself."

Jenkins shook his head doubtfully.

"It won't be very easy, sir, by my way of thinkin'," he observed, "to get 'em to believe that she killed 'im single-'anded. Besides, wot did 'e want 'iding the body in 'is statue for and settin' fire to it, if 'e knew that she 'ad only been defendin' 'erself?"

"Yes, I've asked myself that question. It's not very easy to answer. I think Diarmid had the idea in the back of his mind from the beginning that Miss Wildermere might act violently in . . . in certain circumstances. I think that, in a queer sort of way, he expected her to do something of the sort."

The doctor paused. Jenkins's honest face expressed deepening perplexity.

"You don't follow me?"

"No, sir, I do not. Most fellas wots in love wiv a girl thinks that their girl's an angel."

"I know, but Diarmid isn't like other men. He doesn't admire angels; hates them, in fact. The

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women he admires are strong-minded, perhaps even wild women. . . ."

"Spice of the devil, eh?"

"Oh, no. Not that even. Something much . . . much more real than that, much simpler, more human. I think that from the very beginning Diarmid had made up his mind that the woman with whom he should fall in love must conform strictly to his own particular pattern; and, of course, she did conform. We can always see what we want to see in the people we love. . . ."

The butler clutched at the last sentence which, it seemed, reminded him of a standing dispute between his own father and mother. Dr. Hailey heard him with vacant eyes.

"Diarmid's pattern-girl might have drawn a knife on Raoul Featherstone," he went on, "and so the real girl whom he loved had probably done so . . . indeed, had certainly done so. It isn't the kind of reasoning, I'm afraid, though, which a jury is going to listen to."

"No, sir, it ain't. It's facts wot juries must 'ave, not *hideas*."

The doctor took out his snuff-box and opened it.

"There are one or two facts which the police have not been able to explain. I found the stopper of a poison bottle on the floor of Featherstone's studio, but no bottle. I rang up all the chemists' shops in the district. . . ."

He stopped. A look of dismay had appeared on Jenkins's face.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the man exclaimed, "but there was a call for you from a chemist's shop in 'Ampstead yesterday. I was out, and Mary Ellen

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answered it. She didn't get the name. . . . I meant to tell you, but by not 'aving the name the call slipped from my mind. . . ."

Dr. Hailey thrust his snuff-box back into his pocket.

"Did they leave any message?"

"No, sir."

"Get me the Hampstead Directory, Jenkins. Fortunately, I marked the names of the firms with whom I communicated."

CHAPTER XXXV

TINCT. OPII

THE manager of the chemist's shop conducted by Messrs. Smythe and Johnes in Finchley Road was a young man with a very loud voice. He stated that his name was Oliphant, and received Dr. Hailey as if he knew him. He conducted the doctor into a room which he described as "my sanctum".

"It is very curious," he said, "that you should have asked us that question about the glass stopper. In point of fact, you seem to have known of our loss before we knew about it ourselves." Mr. Oliphant hooked his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat and drew himself up. "No doubt, sir, you remember that story of Edgar Allan Poe's in which an object was successfully hidden by being placed directly under the eyes of the people who were looking for it."

"Yes. . . ."

"So it has happened again. The bottle from which the stopper is missing was standing on a shelf facing the main counter of the establishment. Everybody saw it. Nobody noticed it."

Mr. Oliphant moved his fingers rhythmically on his fawn-coloured waistcoat like a violinist testing his strings.

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"Do me the honour of examining the shelf for yourself."

He opened the door and bowed the doctor out of the room. Dr. Hailey glanced at the serried ranks of bottles on all the walls. He walked to the main counter. A moment later his hand went out across the counter to grasp a large blue phial from which the stopper was missing. The phial bore the label in faded gold lettering:

"Tinct. Opii (Laudanum) Poison."

Dr. Hailey carried it back into Mr. Oliphant's "sanctum" and Mr. Oliphant again closed the door of that room. The doctor took the stopper, which he had found in Raoul Featherstone's studio, from his pocket and placed it gently in the neck of the phial.

"As hand fits glove," Mr. Oliphant cried in tones of real enthusiasm. "And now, sir, may I ask you how you became possessed of this stopper? For I feel that it can be no ordinary motive which has brought Dr. Eustace Hailey to our humble establishment on such an errand."

He bowed again. After a moment's reflection Dr. Hailey told him.

Mr. Oliphant felt the handle of the door to make sure that the door was really shut. Then he buttoned his jacket over his waistcoat.

"The study of crime," he said, in tones of gravity, "has been the passion of my life. Believe me, I have read every scrap of evidence which has been published about the Hampstead mystery."

Dr. Hailey did not reply. His gaze was set on the laudanum bottle. Here, at last, was a real fact to set against the facts on which Biles relied.

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"The trial begins, does it not, on Monday? If this new clue possesses the significance which my instinct seems to tell me it does possess, five days is all too short a period in which to follow it up."

Dr. Hailey raised vacant eyes to the manager's face.

"I take it you know who was on duty in the shop on the night of the tragedy?" he asked.

"I can find out."

Mr. Oliphant left the room. He closed the door of the room carefully and silently behind him. When he came back his pale face was tense with excitement.

"We have the man here now," he stated. "With your consent, doctor, I propose to invite him to come to this room."

"Yes. . . ."

Dr. Hailey leaned back in his chair. When the assistant entered he put his eyeglass in his eye.

"Do you know Mr. Raoul Featherstone by sight?" he asked.

The young man started. He glanced nervously from the doctor to his employer.

"No, sir."

"But you remember the night on which Mr. Featherstone is said to have been murdered?"

"I was on late duty that night. . . . I—I have read about the case in the papers."

Again the assistant directed an anxious glance at Mr. Oliphant.

"Was it a busy night, so far as you were concerned?" the doctor asked.

"About the usual, I think. . . . Three or four prescriptions and some sales. . . ." The assistant

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contracted his brows and then released them again sharply. "I believe," he stated, "that that was the night a gentleman came in and ordered a pick-me-up."

"A young man?"

"Oh, yes, quite young. I—I thought he had had a few drinks. He was in evening dress. He looked rather excited."

"Do you remember if he was wearing an overcoat?"

The assistant shook his head.

"No, sir. I only know that he was in evening dress."

Dr. Hailey allowed his eyeglass to drop.

"What did you give him?" he asked.

"Oh, the usual. Spirit Ammon. Arom.; Spirit Aeth. Ni.; and a few drops of Capsicum."

"A stimulant?"

"Yes." The assistant again contracted his brows. "I do remember now that he had no overcoat because he spilt some of the dose over his shirt-front and turned in the lapels of his jacket to try to cover the stain."

"Where did you dispense the pick-me-up?"

"In the dispensary behind the shop."

"So that he was left alone in the shop for a few minutes?"

"Yes, but another customer came in before I got back to the shop. I'm sure of that because I recollect the new customer, that's Mr. Davidson who keeps the fruit shop next door, asking me who he was and saying that he thought he was drunk. And, oh, yes, it was the night of the murder because the murder was on early closing day, and Mr. Davidson

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came for a headache powder for Mrs. Davidson, who had caught a chill on a bus going out to see her father and mother at St. Albans that day. . . ."

Dr. Hailey nodded. The reasoning satisfied him.

"How was Mr. Davidson dressed, do you remember?" he asked.

The assistant shook his head. "I couldn't say. He had a coat on. . . ."

"Boots?"

"I—I couldn't say. . . ."

The doctor rose. "I can ask him that question myself. Meanwhile, I'm very much obliged to you . . . to you also, Mr. Oliphant. There is only one more question. You have no idea, have you, how much laudanum this bottle ought to contain. . . . I mean, no written record of the amount of laudanum which was originally put into it?"

Mr. Oliphant shook his head. "I'm afraid not. We don't usually dispense from these bottles. They were filled some time ago . . . partly as a reserve, partly as a shop-dressing."

When he left the chemist's shop Dr. Hailey entered that of Mr. Davidson. This man, a Scot, had preserved a clear recollection of the incident in the chemist's.

"I mind him well," he stated, "a young man with a soft face. I had my slippers on and got to the door of the shop before he heard me. When I opened the door he seemed to be leaning on the counter but he pulled himself up sharp and turned round. I saw then that he had had a drop too much."

"You are sure of that? . . ."

"Aye, I'm sure." Mr. Davidson permitted himself a smile.

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"Did he speak to you, by any chance?"

"No. I wish't him 'Good night' but he just stared at me and so I never spoke again."

Dr. Hailey's expression as he drove away from the shop was eager. He returned home and immediately rang up Inspector Biles at Scotland Yard. An hour later Biles walked into his consulting-room. The doctor told him the result of his investigations.

"I think it is a fair inference," he concluded, "that Featherstone drank some of the laudanum in that bottle. The arrival of the greengrocer surprised him, apparently. Davidson saw him leaning over the counter and thought that he was very drunk but, as you can realize, there is another and more satisfying explanation of that action. The laudanum bottle could easily be reached by leaning across the counter; I reached it myself in that way. Moreover, if Featherstone had been so drunk that he required to lean on the counter he could scarcely have recovered himself as quickly as, apparently, he did. I think that when he heard Davidson turn the handle of the door he thrust the bottle back into its place on the shelf and slipped the stopper into his pocket. There would not be time to put the stopper in the bottle. Davidson was wearing carpet slippers."

Dr. Hailey paused. A shade of disappointment crossed his face. Biles had listened to his story without betraying the smallest sign of enthusiasm.

"Very interesting, my dear Hailey, but what, after all, does it amount to? We know that Featherstone was stabbed. . . . We know that he was able to attack Echo Wilderness some time after his visit to the chemist's shop. If he did swallow some

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laudanum, which, after all, is conjecture on your part, that drug can have had very little effect on him, surely."

"Ah, no." Dr. Hailey began to pace the floor. "Don't forget that Featherstone had had one or more drinks before he took the laudanum. Don't forget, too, that he swallowed a pick-me-up immediately after he took the laudanum, a pick-me-up containing aromatic spirits of ammonia among other things. The effect of the drinks and the pick-me-up is opposed to the effects of opium. Some time would be bound to elapse before the opium was able to take effect."

"Even so, the effect would be drowsiness, not excitement, surely."

"No, that is not the case. Opium, like all the other narcotic drugs, has an excitement stage before the drowsy stage. Sometimes very violent excitement is caused, and in this instance clearly the excitement stage was likely to be very much prolonged . . . owing to the alcohol and the ammonia." The doctor stopped in his walk. "If the account of the wound which Phyllis Leyland has given me is to be relied on, it was certainly not a fatal wound."

Biles lit his pipe before he replied.

"By her own showing Phyllis Leyland did not wait to make any investigation," he said at last. "The wound in the neck may not have been the only wound."

"I grant that. On the other hand, there is this to be said. Phyllis Leyland drew the knife out of the wound. That, as a rule, is a very painful process, and I don't suppose that she took any precautions to render it less painful. The pain, if the effect of the opium was not yet fully developed'

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would certainly rouse Featherstone from his stupor. It seems to me not only possible, but even probable, that after Phyllis went away he tried to rise to his feet. If Echo Wildermere did in fact enter the studio at that moment it is quite likely that she may have been attacked because, as I have told you, the excitement of opium is often of a violent character. Featherstone would be maddened by pain; at the same time his wits would be scattered by the drug. It is very likely that he did not recognize Echo. . . ."

Biles struck another match and applied it to the bowl of his pipe.

"I'm afraid that things don't happen in that way," he said. "My experience has been that it is the simple and not the very complicated which is usually true in this world. Do you mean to say that if there had been any possible explanation of Featherstone's death, other than the explanation that he was murdered, Alaister Diarmid would have taken such tremendous trouble to dispose of his body?"

"Yes, I think he would." Dr. Hailey approached the detective and stood before him. "Diarmid was convinced at the time, and is convinced still, I believe, that Echo Wildermere killed Featherstone. He was in no mood, even supposing that he possessed the necessary knowledge, to distinguish between the effects of laudanum and the effects of bleeding from a wound. Featherstone sank into unconsciousness and died before his eyes. . . . Echo Wildermere was covered with blood, dishevelled, distraught."

"But she told him that she had not wounded Featherstone. Don't forget that fact. And he is her lover."

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The doctor sighed deeply. "There, my dear Biles," he said, "we come up against the purely personal factor . . . the factor of Alaister Diarmid's psychology. Remember that you are dealing with a genius about whom the world is agreed that he sees humanity with pitiless eyes, ruthlessly, even brutally."

Biles rose and reached for his hat.

"My business," he said in crisp tones, "is with juries, not art critics. Never fear, we shall give the accused every benefit of every doubt—the laudanum included. And then, my dear doctor, we shall show them that array of charred bones which you put together so cleverly. I'm afraid that even the psychology of genius will count for little or nothing against these material facts."

CHAPTER XXXVI

"YELLOW STREAK"

THE great gateway of Pentonville Prison contains a postern which is a true *via dolorosa*. As he passed through this little door Dr. Hailey experienced a sense of chill. He was passing from life to that realm which, even to-day, is divided from it so that the visitor has a first impression of a sepulchre tenanted by those about to die. While he stood at the porter's lodge awaiting his escort he saw two men in prison clothes being conducted past the lodge by a warder. The men went by briskly enough. But he fancied that in the eyes of one of them he saw the mirrored image of his own secret thought.

The warder who conducted him through the prison to the Medical Officer's house was a genial fellow. The long galleries with their iron-clad doors, which suggested the interior economy of a battleship, seemed to be a matter of some pride to this man, for he indicated them after the fashion of a guide who is anxious to make a favourable impression. The doctor gathered it had not been so always in this progressive establishment. He gathered further, when a bell rang in one of the upper galleries, that his warder viewed the evolution of prison life doubtfully, for, in reply to his own unguarded "What's

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that?" spoken in apprehension, he received the reply :

"Only one of our guests ringing for a whisky-and-soda, sir."

Dr. Hailey glanced at the man and met smiling eyes. He made haste to adjust his eyeglass. His mind travelled swiftly back to the day on which, as a medical student, he had entered the dissecting-room for the first time. Dismay had overwhelmed him on the threshold, whereas, the older students, passing in and out, had shown complete indifference. The thought was still in his mind when he shook hands with Dr. Daylight, the Chief Medical Officer of the prison, and explained to him that he held a permit to visit Alaister Diarmid. . . .

"I wanted to talk to you, Daylight, because I know what fine work your service is doing on the psychology of crime, and Diarmid is a man who has both interested and puzzled me."

Dr. Daylight indicated a chair near the fire from which, though he seemed to be unaware of the fact, an excellent view could be obtained of the prisoners taking exercise in the prison yard. Dr. Hailey sat down and immediately grew interested in an elderly convict who was walking round a circular patch of grass, in a manner which recalled irresistibly the canter of a circus-horse round the ring. The man looked plump and white, and his face expressed just that shade of detachment which characterizes the bearing of plump white horses in circuses. He seemed bored rather than resentful. There was a young man behind him who was also walking round the patch of grass. The young man's face was red, and it wore a look of hatred. The doctor's eyes strayed from

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these two figures to other figures walking in other parts of the yard. Then he saw the small shed which is used every day as a tool-house, but some days as a place in which to put men to death. Dr. Crippen, that quiet, neat little man, had trotted on a foggy morning into the tool-shed . . . Roger Casement, too, secure in his adamantine vanity . . . and Bywaters, the well-mannered boy, whose death, more even than the death of Edith Thompson, his poor "Edie Piedi", with its unwhispered horror, had made hearts sick. Was Alaister Diarmid to follow where these had passed? Dr. Hailey started. He realized suddenly that his colleague was looking at him.

"The tool-shed?"

"Yes."

Dr. Daylight nodded his round head.

"I see it every day of my life," he remarked in vague tones. "I think that in time I shall be able to look at it without seeing it." He lit a cigarette. "Diarmid interests me," he declared, "but I haven't made up my mind about him yet."

"You know his work, of course?" Dr. Hailey took snuff. He turned his eyes resolutely away from the window.

"Oh, yes. And his nickname 'Yellow Streak'. That's what his friends call him, I understand, because everything he does has a streak of evil in it. I'm no judge, but I think the charge in this case is justified. Did you see his 'Samson with Delilah'?"

"No."

The prison doctor shook his head. "All the strength of weakness, all the weakness of strength in a frightful

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mingling. The thing haunted me just as a few of the faces I see here haunt me, his own face among the number. He told me yesterday, by the way, that he had always thought he would be hanged. He kept quoting :

“ ‘Hanging and Wiving go by destiny.’ ”

“I suppose the truth is that he killed his rival in a fit of jealousy . . . ?”

“I am not sure if that is the truth.”

Dr. Hailey took a pinch of snuff. They went out across the yard where the prisoners were exercising to that wing of the prison in which persons awaiting trial are lodged. The prison doctor conducted his colleague to the room where prisoners are permitted to receive visitors. He left him there. A few minutes later Alaister entered the room.

The sculptor bowed stiffly, then he glanced towards the open door through which the back of the warder who had brought him from his cell was visible. There was hostility as well as contempt in his glance.

“This is an honour,” he exclaimed bitterly, “with which I could well have dispensed !”

He stood challenging and unfriendly. Dr. Hailey sat down at the bare deal table with which the room was furnished. In quiet methodical fashion he told Alaister about the investigations he had made in connection with the glass stopper.

“Two facts emerge,” he concluded : “that Raoul Featherstone was probably under the influence of opium when he was wounded, and that the wound he received was neither severe nor fatal. His death was due, in all probability, to opium poisoning.”

Alaister frowned, but a moment later he sat down

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on the opposite side of the table from the doctor. He put his elbows on the table and rested his chin on his hands.

"I noticed," he said, "that the pupils of his eyes were very small, like pin-points."

"Quite so . . . the opium pupil. It would have been easy to determine the cause of death if the body had remained available."

There was a note of regret in Dr. Hailey's voice. The sculptor raised his shoulders.

"What does it matter, anyhow?" he exclaimed.

The doctor started slightly. His genial face became overcast.

"There is Miss Wildermere, as well as yourself," he remarked severely.

"They are bound to acquit her."

"On the contrary, you have made it quite certain that, if you are convicted, she will be convicted also. Everything which you have done has contributed to pile up suspicion against her."

"Nonsense."

Dr. Hailey bent forward towards Alaister.

"As I see it the root cause of all the trouble in this case," he said, "is your belief that Miss Wildermere stabbed Featherstone. And yet the only evidence you have to support your belief is the fact that when Miss Wildermere came to your house her clothes were torn and she was bleeding. She offered you a reasonable, if rather surprising, explanation of these circumstances—an explanation which my discovery of Featherstone's visit to the chemist's shop confirms in the most remarkable way. You refused that explanation."

The doctor paused to afford Alaister an opportunity

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of accepting the challenge in his last sentence. The sculptor, however, remained silent.

"I have asked myself very often in these last few days why you refused. At first I was inclined to think that your genius as an artist had revealed some flaw in Miss Wildermere's character which made it seem probable to you that she would act violently if her feelings were injured. Your statue of Andromeda shows, perhaps, that such a flaw exists. But your statue shows also another quality—complete, fearless candour. The woman you have modelled might strike a blow; she would not afterwards deny that she had struck it."

Again the doctor paused. The clang of an iron door struck sharply on the silence.

"And Miss Wildermere did deny that she had wounded Featherstone. Why, then, did you continue to doubt her? Why, in other words, did you reject your own reading of her character?"

"I don't know why."

Alaister's voice was so low that Dr. Hailey was only just able to hear it.

"You did reject your own reading of her character?"

"Yes."

The doctor took his snuff-box from his pocket and rubbed its lid slowly with his thumb.

"There are people who find crime in any form irresistibly attractive," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"That I have come, step by step, to the conclusion that you believe Miss Wildermere to be guilty because, without knowing it, you want her to be guilty . . . because the idea that she is guilty is in some secret way pleasing to you. . . ."

"YELLOW STREAK"

The doctor spoke slowly. He kept his eyes fixed on Alaister's face.

"Psychoanalysis?" the sculptor sneered.

"You may call it that if you choose. I prefer to call it a series of logical deductions from your conduct. When a man persists in an opinion which the available evidence discounts, he must have some private, some purely personal, reason for his persistence. All your work shows how greatly you are attracted by the macabre."

Alaister rose and began to pace the stone flags.

"Somebody wounded Featherstone," he declared explosively.

Dr. Hailey took the glass stopper and the fragment which had been broken off from it from his pocket and laid them on the table in front of him.

"I have satisfied myself," he stated, "that this was broken by being flung down violently on the floor. I can think of no special reason why Featherstone should have flung it down. On the other hand, he may well have shown it to one of his visitors . . . as a proof that he had only a short time to live."

He paused. Alaister returned to the table and stood looking down at the broken glass.

"Why should he wish to prove that he had only a short time to live?" he asked.

"It is one way of getting out of a tight corner, isn't it?"

"You mean that the visitor flung the stopper down on the floor?"

"Yes. The visitor who perhaps was angry and unbelieving and determined not to be put off with any cock-and-bull story. Men who make love to every woman they meet are liable to receive such

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visitors. Husbands and fathers and brothers, or even, it may be, the disenchanted lady herself." Dr. Hailey took a pinch of snuff. "I think," he added, "that we may assume with confidence that if Miss Wildermere had been told the story about the dose of laudanum she would not have kept the story to herself."

"Oh, no, of course not."

"And the same applies to your cousin, Mrs. Leyland, doesn't it?"

Alaister nodded.

"Consequently, these two were not the only visitors to the studio. There was another visitor who was told the story, an angry visitor with a substantial grievance."

"You don't mean Lionel Leyland, do you?"

"No. Leyland was on his way home with a broken skull when Featherstone returned from the chemist's shop."

CHAPTER XXXVII

SLAVE OF MEMORY

ALAISTER sat down and rested his head on his hands. His fingers were thrust deeply among his hair and they bent and unbent in a swift spasmodic movement. His eyes shone with excitement.

"Do you remember," he asked suddenly, "the trial twenty years ago of Mrs. Livingstone for the murder of her husband?"

"Very well, indeed."

"She was a distant relation of mine. . . . She was the first woman with whom I fell in love. . . ."

Alaister flung out his words. A deep flush spread over his face.

"In spite of her acquittal nobody believed in her innocence!" he exclaimed; "not even her own people. She was left alone, shunned. My mother spoke of her as 'murderess' in my hearing, and that was the general verdict. . . . She was damned pretty, though." He raised his great head and faced the doctor. "God knows, her eyes were the gentlest and her lips the sweetest woman ever possessed. From the hour I saw her first I was her slave. I was sixteen, nearly seventeen, and she was twenty-four or five. She needed nothing so much in the world as someone, anyone, to love her and be kind to her. . . ."

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"A boy of seventeen loves without thought, just as he breathes or is hungry and eats. Love is part of Nature. But it is not the less overwhelming on that account. I saw only Grizelda, heard only Grizelda, imagined only Grizelda. I had the sense of being caught up out of the world and borne to the gateways of the stars. Heavenly music rang in my ears.

"But beneath that ecstasy there were other feelings, dim, unrealized, very real nevertheless. Grizelda had killed—for what boy of seventeen in his secret heart doubts the verdict of his mother? So she was cruel and terrible, as well as beautiful and alluring. That knowledge pierced me: it possessed me until Grizelda's crime became part of her attractiveness. I grew to love her crime, to cherish it, to gloat over it. I would not have had it that she was innocent."

Alaister stood up. He flung out his arms violently.

"It is difficult to explain that feeling, but probably, as a student of the mind, you know what I mean. Compared with Grizelda the other girls whom I knew were shadows. They seemed so pale, so lifeless, so insipid. They were water, whereas she was red wine. Because they were innocent whereas she was guilty. But I didn't think these things. I was only aware of them, as you are aware of the perfume of flowers in a hothouse. Actually I told myself that Grizelda was innocent and that those who said she was guilty slandered her."

He raised his hand to his brow and drew it wearily across his eyes.

"So I became her champion as well as her lover. One day a friend of our family, a man of thirty, spoke disparagingly of her at our dinner-table. I

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followed him out of the house and demanded that he should retract his calumny. He told me to go to the devil, called me a young fool. I struck him between the eyes. We fought in the darkness of the avenue, among the winter trees. He thrashed me. I fled away from him to my bedroom and locked myself in. I wept till sleep came. The next day I told Grizelda what had happened.

"I can see her face now as she listened to me . . . her eyes a little wild as if they were full of blushes and laughter. Full of shame and laughter and excitement. Suddenly I thought that she was interested in this man about whom I was telling her, and I became fiercely jealous. 'Don't you hate him?' I cried, and when she said 'Oh, no, I should like to meet him,' I grew cold. Because that was exactly what I had suspected. I shouted, and stormed, and called her names. But she soothed me very quickly. A few days later I met her walking with the man."

Alaister paused again. His face was drawn as though the pain of that moment of revelation lay living still in his memory. His voice assumed a deeper, huskier tone.

"I joined them, and walked beside her, but I wasn't able to speak a single word, and my silence made them silent. I knew that Grizelda was angry with me, and I guessed that I had spoiled her game with my rival. The man's face was as black as night. Awful feelings of despair and rage possessed my mind—suspicions, too. I left them, but that evening I went to see Grizelda. I demanded that she should have nothing to do with any man but myself." Alaister's fists were clenched. "Grizelda looked prettier that night than I had ever before seen her.

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She was excited because at last she had got a man interested in her, and her excitement coloured her cheeks and brightened her eyes. She began to play with me. God, how cruel she was ! And the colour kept heightening in her cheeks each time she scratched. She looked like all the angels and all the devils. I bore it as long as I could and then something snapped. I laid my hands on her . . . on her white throat. . . .”

He opened his hands and held them palms downward, with stiffened fingers.

“I called her ‘murderess’ and then the fury went out of me. I opened my eyes and saw that she was in great fear of me. I thought that I didn’t desire her any longer, that I was done with her for ever. I flung her away from me and went out into the dark.” His voice fell to a whisper. “You are right. There are scars which never heal, which are youth’s perpetual revenge . . . red scars ? From that hour, until now, as you say, I have been the slave of memory . . . of the memory of my love of Grizelda.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE LAST HOPE

DR. HAILEY remained silent for some minutes after Alaister had finished. Then he laid his hand on the sculptor's arm.

"There is not one of us," he said, "who has not been threatened by a similar slavery of memory. His first love affair becomes a dominant note on every man's life unless its influence, which is nearly always harmful, is resisted."

"Don't talk to me about resistance. . . ."

"I must talk to you about it. Until a man resists the emotional stresses of his early years he does not become a man." The doctor put his eyeglass in his eye. "Your red scar, as you call it, is the most deadly of all the forms of self-indulgence; the fact that it is unhealed proves that you have shirked contact with reality during your whole life. You have refused to face the facts of your life and have hidden yourself in dreams."

He paused. Alaister was scowling heavily.

"Worse still, you've made of your man's love a mere phantom of the love of your boyhood. You've snatched blindly at the idea that Miss Wildermere wounded Featherstone because, twenty years ago, you allowed yourself to gloat over the thought that Mrs. Livingstone had committed murder, and because

you found such gloating pleasant. In these last weeks, believe me, you've drunk deeply of the same satisfaction while persuading yourself that you were acting a heroic part."

Dr. Hailey's face was stern. But there was a quality of kindness in his voice which rather discounted that expression. The sculptor sat gazing at him blankly.

"I am quite sure that I am genuinely in love with Echo," he declared, "though I don't deny that there may be something in what you say."

"I think that you may possibly learn to love her. Loving a woman is a man's job. It demands self-sacrifice and self-discipline, qualities of manhood. Had you exercised these qualities you could not have believed Miss Wildermere to be guilty of this crime, and would not, therefore, have acted in the incredibly foolish way in which you have acted." The doctor paused for a moment. Then he added: "It is just possible that if you begin to exercise these qualities now, the danger which threatens both Miss Wildermere and yourself may be averted."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you may be impelled to tell the truth at your trial . . . to admit that you suspected Miss Wildermere, and that every step you took was dictated by that suspicion. The evidence which I have been able to collect may be just enough to raise a doubt in the minds of the jury whether or not Featherstone really died as a result of his wound."

Dr. Hailey watched his companion closely as he spoke. He saw resistance to his suggestion smouldering in the man's eyes. He held out his hand and then

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turned to leave the cell. Before he reached the door Alaister was at his side.

"I want to thank you for coming," he exclaimed. "And I want to thank you also for what you have said to me. I . . . I shall try to profit by what you have said."

When he returned to Harley Street, Dr. Hailey experienced a sharp reaction of feeling. The hopes which he had cherished fled away from him. What did it matter now, three days before the trial, what Alaister resolved. A sigh escaped the doctor's lips. Alaister's case was the case of thousands of other men. Everywhere, as he knew, there were husbands and lovers who cherished the scars of their boyhood and who lived like dreamers in a world of reality. They demanded that the women they married should conform to some adolescent ideal, or satisfy some longing of the past. Nor did the fact that these demands were unconscious make them less oppressive or insistent. Hundreds of marriages were wrecked every year because men refused to be men and to put away childish things; because they refused to look their wives in the face and see them as human beings. In his haste to transform Echo Wildermere to the image of Grizelda, Alaister had destroyed the evidence which must almost certainly have saved both Echo and himself.

The doctor began to pace his consulting-room. The only hope which remained was the discovery of the person who had broken the glass stopper, and there existed, so far as he could see, not a single scrap of evidence which might lead to that discovery. The unknown person had left no traces.

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He had left though clear proof that he had experienced a sudden gust of rage. Only the hand of a very angry individual could have clashed the stopper to the floor with sufficient violence to break it. Had this gust of rage been occasioned by Featherstone's announcement that he had taken poison ? He stopped in his walk. If that was so then the unknown probably stood to lose heavily by Featherstone's death. Dr. Hailey's eyes assumed the vacant expression which betokened rapid action of his mind.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SMELL OF IODOFORM

THE next morning Dr. Hailey drove to 'Alaister's house in Hampstead. The gate leading into the garden was locked, and the place seemed to be deserted. He was about to re-enter his car when he saw a policeman approaching along the private road.

He recognized the man as one of those whom he had met in Raoul Featherstone's studio. The policeman told him that, after the sculptor's arrest, Kennedy had closed the house and gone to live at home in Flask Lane. He added that he had a key and was ready to open the gate if the doctor so desired.

"Yes, I should like to look at one or two things in the house."

Alaister's rooms seemed pathetically empty and lifeless, and Dr. Hailey did not remain in them for more than a few minutes. After he had knelt down and examined the carpet near the couch on which Raoul Featherstone's body had been laid, he mounted the stairs and entered the butler's room.

It was a small apartment, at the back of the house, and it smelt slightly of damp. A bed, a chest of drawers in black oak, on the top of which stood a looking-glass, and a hanging wardrobe completed the furnishings.

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There were several photographs on the chest of drawers. He recognized one of these as Lolotte the housemaid, and guessed that another represented the girl's sister. He opened one of the drawers and saw that it was full of shirts and collars. Then he drew back the curtain which covered the wardrobe. The butler had not removed his clothes.

There were several coats and waistcoats, each suspended on a hanger. He dismounted one of the coats and carried it to the window. He focused his eyeglass on each of the sleeves in turn. Then he replaced the coat and dismounted its neighbour. He repeated that process three times without, apparently, finding anything unusual. But his first glance at the fourth coat caused him to stiffen perceptibly. There was a stain on the right arm of the coat just above the bend of the elbow.

He passed his finger lightly over the stain. He was able to detect some hardening of the cloth, though rather less than he had expected. His glass revealed the presence on the black surface of a number of very small white threads. So the stain had been rubbed with a handkerchief. He carried the coat downstairs with him and laid it on the table in the entrance hall. He walked through Alaister's lounge to his work-room, and stood looking at the apparatus with which the place was littered. Then he glanced at his watch, and immediately went out, across the lawn, to the wall separating the house from Raoul Featherstone's studio. He jumped the wall and walked to the studio door and again consulted his watch.

He returned to Alaister's house and took possession of Kennedy's coat. The policeman was waiting for

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him at the garden gate. He gave the man a tip and told him what he had done.

"I want you to report the matter," he added. "I shall report it myself to Scotland Yard."

He looked at his watch again and then drove rapidly out of the private road and over the hill to Hampstead village. When he reached the end of Flask Lane, he timed himself once more. The journey from Frognaal to Flask Lane had occupied exactly three minutes, and he had suffered a slight check at the entrance to the High Street.

He drove back to Harley Street and went at once to his laboratory, a small apartment behind his consulting-room. He shut the door and laid Kennedy's coat on the work-table. Then he took a watch-glass and poured a few drops of clear liquid into it. He dipped the stain on the coat into the watch-glass. A few minutes later he saw, in the field of his micro-spectroscope, the characteristic spectrum of hæmoglobin—that is to say, of blood.

It was quite possible that Kennedy had lifted Raoul Featherstone's body in his arms; the position of the stain on the sleeve of his coat corresponded to the position which Featherstone's wound must have occupied had he been lifted.

Dr. Hailey re-entered his car and drove back to Hampstead. He left the car outside a shop in the High Street and walked into Flask Lane. At a fruit-stall in the lane he asked for the butler's address.

"That 'ouse over there, wiv the red blinds," the saleswoman told him.

He glanced across the narrow roadway and saw a house of the type common in Old Hampstead, a house beautiful in its lack of any kind of ornament,

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small but not inconsiderable. The "red blinds", he noticed, were faded window curtains. Nevertheless they made harmony with the rich colour of the brickwork. He crossed the street and knocked on the door. Kennedy opened the door.

The butler took a step backwards when he saw who his visitor was. Then he recovered his self-possession and, with it, his professional manner. He stood silent, awaiting explanations.

"I wish to speak to you . . . alone."

Dr. Hailey's voice was chill. The chill communicated itself to Kennedy, who began to look frightened.

"Very good, sir."

The butler stood back. He closed the door carefully after the doctor had entered.

"It so 'appens that I'm alone this afternoon," he explained. "My daughter Anita, wot's keepin' 'ouse for me at the present time, 'aving gone out to the pictures." He coughed nervously. "My sister, she's stoppin' with friends in the country, whereas Lolotte, wot was with me at Frognal Lane, 'as taken the 'uff and gone off to a place by 'erself. . . ."

He had opened the door of his sitting-room while he was speaking. Dr. Hailey beheld what, at first sight, looked like a remote corner of a museum in a country town. It appeared that, in his leisure moments, Kennedy was a stuffer of birds and beasts and fishes. The doctor glanced at him to observe whether or not he was aware of his treasures at this moment. Kennedy's eyes were blank. Dr. Hailey sat down on the only chair which seemed at all capable of supporting his weight. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye.

"You were off duty, I think," he said, "on the

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night on which Major Lionel Leyland was brought into Mr. Diarmid's house?"

"Yes, sir. I was 'ere that night, with my sister, as she could tell you if she was present."

"But you got back to Frogmal Lane before Mr. Diarmid left the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you happen, by any chance, to look into his car when you passed it? It was standing, if you recollect, in the private road."

"No, sir, I didn't."

The doctor closed his eyes.

"You are chauffeur as well as butler, aren't you?"

"In a manner of speaking. But it's not often that Mr. Diarmid don't drive the car hisself."

"Still, you do drive sometimes?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

Dr. Hailey leaned forward and fixed his eyes on the butler's face.

"I examined your clothes over at Frogmal Lane, this afternoon," he stated. "I found a bloodstain on the sleeve of one of your coats."

"Indeed, sir."

Kennedy's eyes narrowed, but not before the lively fear which possessed them had been revealed.

"The stain suggested, by its position, that you had carried someone with a wound on his shoulder."

"I 'aven't carried anybody. God is my witness to that."

The doctor remained silent for a few minutes.

"I have calculated," he said, at last, "that you had time to carry Mr. Raoul Featherstone's body out of your master's room, put it in the car, which was standing ready in the private road, drive it over here,

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deposit it in this house, and get back again while your master was making the last of his visits to Mr. Featherstone's studio. What do you say to that?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You deny that you brought the body over here?"

"Certainly." Kennedy brought his agitated hands to rest on the arms of the chair in which he was sitting. "Suppose I 'ad brought it 'ere," he asked with a trace of insolence in his voice, "'ow did I carry it back again? It was found, wasn't it, in Mr. Alaister's car, wot he set alight on the 'igh road?"

"Yes, it was found there."

"And accordin' to the newspapers you made a search of the car yourself just before Mr. Alaister drove away in it . . . and found nothing."

"That is true, I admit."

"There wasn't time, on that occasion any'ow, to run across 'ere and pick the body up. . . . I mean between the time of your searchin' the car and the time of Mr. Alaister drivin' away in it."

"No, there wasn't." The doctor brought the points of his fingers together. "Nobody could have made the journey to Flask Lane and back in the time. I agree that that single fact seems to negative absolutely the idea that you had anything to do with the tragedy. He raised his head sharply. "And yet, as I have told you, there's a bloodstain on the sleeve of one of your coats, on the exact spot where a bloodstain might be if you had lifted a man with a wound in his left shoulder . . . on the exact spot where I looked for a bloodstain."

The last words were spoken slowly. But they exerted very little effect on Kennedy, who seemed to have recovered all his habitual self-possession.

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"I'm afraid, sir, you must put that down to a bleedin' of the nose what I 'ad a few days ago," he said.

Dr. Hailey rose.

"I understood your master to say that you helped him occasionally with the casting of his statues, is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"But not with the casting of the statue of Andromeda?"

"With the first casting of that statue only."

The butler's impassive features were in perfect keeping with his air of detachment. He opened the door of the room and stood back to allow his visitor to pass. But Dr. Hailey lingered.

"Am I right in thinking," he inquired, "that you use iodoform to preserve the skins of the animals you stuff?"

"Quite right, sir."

"Extraordinarily penetrating smell it has. I felt the smell the moment I crossed your threshold. You're stuffing something now, I take it?"

"Yes, sir, in the kitchen, sir, a pet dog belonging to a lady in 'Ampstead."

The doctor passed through the doorway into the narrow entrance hall. Suddenly, before Kennedy had time to follow him, he turned towards the kitchen, the door of which stood ajar, and pushed the door wide open. The kitchen table was bare. There was no sign in the little room of any work or any animal. Dr. Hailey turned and faced the butler.

"I'm afraid the Hampstead lady must have taken her pet dog away," he remarked in gentle tones.

Kennedy vouchsafed no reply.

CHAPTER XL

DEADLOCK

THE day before the trial of Alaister and Echo began, Dr. Hailey visited the offices in Clement's Inn, of Messrs. Smythe and Gravesend, Alaister's solicitors. He was received by Sir Hector Smythe, in an impressive but rather dusty room which overlooked the Law Courts.

Sir Hector was a small fat man with a genial expression and an irritable temper, a man who lived very close to the gout, but a shrewd lawyer. He and Dr. Hailey were old acquaintances.

"As ever," he remarked, "minding other men's business for them. My dear Hailey, you will die young."

"Lawyers do not die young."

"But we get paid for our services." Suddenly the smile on Sir Hector's face disappeared. "You come as a friend, I take it," he asked, "or you would not come at all?"

"Yes."

The doctor extracted his snuff-box. He gave the lawyer an account of his investigations and offered the suggestion that Alaister had merely hidden Echo's bloodstained hat and cloak in his statue, and that Raoul's body had been put into the car by another hand.

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"It boils down to this," he summed up. "Raoul Featherstone probably died of opium poisoning, not of his wound. The wound was inflicted by somebody who stood to lose heavily by Raoul Featherstone's death."

Sir Hector contracted his broad brow :

"My dear sir, that's impossible, surely. Why should somebody who stood to lose heavily by Featherstone's death make an attempt to bring about his death?"

"Because Featherstone had attacked him . . . was attacking him. . . ." Dr. Hailey began to rub his eyeglass between his finger and thumb. "Keep the sequence of events steadily in your mind. First, Raoul Featherstone takes the laudanum. This poison doesn't act immediately, because he has already had a number of drinks and has, in addition, swallowed a strong pick-me-up. He returns to his studio in a state of intense irritability and excitement—the excitement stage of opium poisoning. His mind is still clear but his nerves are passing out of his control. The person who stands to lose by his death finds him in this state and accuses him or abuses him. Featherstone shows the stopper of the laudanum bottle as a proof that he is already a dead man. A gust of passionate rage causes his companion to hurl the stopper to the ground.

"That action is enough, much more than enough, to lash Featherstone himself to fury. His irritable nerves explode, and probably he seizes his accuser by the throat. . . . But the rack of knives is near at hand. . . . A person who is being strangled will use any means of salvation which offers itself."

"I see." The lawyer nodded his head sharply

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several times in succession. Then he added : "Your theory is certainly in accord with Miss Echo Wildermere's story of the attack on herself."

"Quite so, and the drawing of the knife out of the wound by Mrs. Leyland acted just as the pick-me-up had acted . . . as a whip on Featherstone's nerves. It served to prolong and to . . . intensify the excitement stage of the opium." Dr. Hailey took another pinch of snuff. "The real question which we have to answer," he declared, "concerns the identity of Featherstone's visitor . . . the person who stood to lose heavily by his death. I confess that the sole reason why I allowed my suspicions to fall on Kennedy, the butler, is that Kennedy has a daughter . . . a remarkably pretty daughter. Lolotte may very well have attracted the notice of Raoul Featherstone. I think that she did attract his notice, because I have ascertained that she overturned the statue of Andromeda, and smashed it, just after she learned that Echo Wildermere was engaged to him. She was in the room when Lionel Leyland told Echo about his wife's relations with Featherstone."

Again Sir Hector nodded.

"Featherstone had promised to marry her, no doubt."

"Of course. Men of his stamp live by promises. Lolotte may very well have confessed to her father, after she smashed the statue, and that confession probably sent Kennedy to the studio. But the man is nervous. He must have suffered agonies of fear when he realized that his master had brought the body of the man he had just stabbed back to the house. The motive to remove the body before the police

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arrived was, certainly, overwhelmingly strong."

Dr. Hailey broke off and spread out his hands.

"I stop there," he added, "because I have failed to carry the story any farther. Kennedy may have driven the wounded man over to Flask Lane. But in that case he must have brought him back again the same night, and hidden him in the house. And the police searched the house a dozen times that night and the following day."

"Is it not possible that the girl Lolotte herself wounded Featherstone? She would be quite likely to confess to her father when she began to realize what she had done."

"I have thought of that. It is certainly possible that Lolotte, and not her father, struck the blow." Dr. Hailey took a paper from his pocket and unfolded it. "I came this afternoon," he said, "to give you this. It's a list of questions which I think ought to be put to Kennedy in cross-examination. The object is to discover what he knows of Lolotte's relations to Featherstone. By the way, the prosecution aren't calling Lolotte, are they?"

Sir Hector shook his head. "We tried to find her ourselves," he stated, "but we failed."

"It seemed she quarrelled with her father and took a place somewhere in the country. Kennedy says she hasn't communicated with him since she left home."

The lawyer contracted his brow.

"If what you have suggested is true, he probably sent her away himself, and is now hiding her."

They sat silent, facing one another, the victims of despondency. What, after all, were these conjectures worth against the fact of the charred bones?

Sir Hector broke the silence :

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"Kennedy," he declared in the tones of a man who has just made up his mind, "certainly did not put the body in his master's car."

"No."

"And therefore he did not take the body to his house in Flask Lane."

"I suppose that follows."

"So we are left with the bare chance that he and not Alaister Diarmid encased the body in the statue. . . ."

"I don't think he would have dared to attempt that single-handed, at a time when his master might return at any moment."

The lawyer inclined his head.

"Could he have managed to hide the body in his bedroom over night? He had time, hadn't he, between your search of the car, and Diarmid's departure, to carry the body out of the house and put it into the car?"

"Plenty of time. But the police searched his bedroom twice over. A mouse could not have escaped that scrutiny."

"What about the garden, or the garage?"

"Searched . . . as thoroughly as the bedroom."

"So we reach deadlock. Kennedy did not hide the body."

Dr. Hailey rose.

"That is the logic of the situation, certainly," he stated. "And yet, somehow, I can't accept the logic of the situation. I have a feeling all the time that we have overlooked some vital piece of evidence. . . ." He paused. "I feel like a man groping in the dark to find the electric switch. . . ."

CHAPTER XLI

CRISIS

WHEN Dr. Hailey left him Alaister gave himself to gloomy thoughts. But after a time his mind began to clear again. Then the realization came to him that something of importance had happened in his life.

He found it difficult at first to understand the nature of this event. But when his thoughts turned to the confession he had made about his relations with Grizelda, its nature became evident to him. Grizelda, in some curious way, had ceased to be an influence in his mind. Instead she had become merely a woman whose misfortunes he pitied. He told himself that the explanation was that he was now in a position to sympathize with her. The experience that he was himself undergoing had been her experience also. She had tasted, as he was tasting, the abomination of desolation, loneliness, darkness, the horror of implacable walls, of locked doors. She had listened at night, as he was listening, to the coming and going of indifferent feet. And she, too, doubtless, had heard the voice of the wind in the night, triumphing in his release. But this explanation left him unsatisfied. His sympathy for Grizelda was cold and detached, whereas his earlier feelings for her had been passionate in their intensity.

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He began to pace his cell on troubled feet. It must be true, then, that for twenty years he had been hankering secretly after this woman. Her influence must have been at work in all his activity . . . those statues which the whole world called ruthless and unpleasant . . . his contempt for the ordinary joys of life, his attitude of angry scorn against his contemporary artists. . . . He had none of the feelings now which used to support that manner. On the contrary he felt as he had felt once, in his childhood, on emerging from a period of high fever. . . . He stopped suddenly. A look of great perplexity came into his eyes. All his fears and suspicions about Echo had vanished from his mind.

He glanced round the miserable apartment, and then walked to the bed. He sat down on the bed and put his head between his hands. He tried to recall the reasons which had induced him to conclude that Echo was guilty . . . her dishevelled appearance at his door, on the night of the tragedy, the recklessness which he had loved to see in her eyes, the faint likeness which she bore, sometimes, to Grizelda . . . shadows . . . shadows. . . . He raised his head and gazed in front of him at the bare wall. He knew now that every word which Dr. Hailey had spoken was true.

Again he began to pace the cell. If only he had not hidden Echo's hat and cloak in his statue, or having hidden them there, had not tried to burn them ! The statue, had it fallen into the hands of the police, would have proved his innocence. . . . Echo's innocence. He pressed his hands to his brow as the horror which had dwelt with him day and night since his arrest rose again stark before his eyes—those

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bones which the police had found in his car. He had not dared even to mention them to the doctor, because there was no man living who would believe that he had not known of their presence.

He felt that he would go mad if he thought about them any longer, because it was impossible that Featherstone's body had lain hidden in the house, all night and all day, while the police were searching every cupboard and every corner for it. And yet it was equally impossible that, if it had been taken away, it could have been brought back again. His car had been empty when he returned with Phyllis, and Dr. Hailey had examined it after that. Was he to suppose that somebody had snatched the body away the night before, and then returned it at the very moment when he was about to leave home?

He threw himself on his bed. He tried to recall Echo's face to his memory, and at last succeeded in that endeavour. A smile lingered on his lips after he had fallen asleep.

He was smiling when he stepped into the dock at the Old Bailey. Echo was already seated in the dock; she greeted him with a cheerfulness which had the instant effect of soothing all his anxieties. A curious exultation possessed him, as if a heavy weight of distress had been lifted from his spirit. He bowed to the judge, Mr. Justice Tindale, who, he thought, looked formidable in his scarlet, before sitting down, and then turned to talk to his counsel, a young man named Ralph Herrick whom he had known slightly for some years. He saw that the court was crowded in every place, and he recognized Dr. Hailey, sitting in the part of the court reserved for expert witnesses. And then the spectacle of

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justice grew dim before his eyes, and he gave himself, easily, to the happiness which the presence of Echo bestowed.

He was commanded to plead and declared that he was "Not Guilty". He heard Echo plead "Not Guilty" in clear, firm tones. The jury were sworn, and then Sir Mark Wilson, leader for the prosecution, rose and began to address them. Alaister glanced at the twelve men who were in process of trying him. He felt unable to distinguish one from another. A hope that they would listen attentively flickered in his mind. He looked at Echo again, and decided soberly that she was the most desirable woman whom he had ever seen, the loveliest woman. Her recklessness, as he saw it now, was a gift from Nature's own hands. It was youth triumphant, infinitely candid and infinitely daring. . . . He started slightly. What was the fellow saying?

"I shall lead evidence, gentlemen, to prove that the prisoner, Alaister Diarmid, adopted a very novel method of disposing of the body of his victim. . . ."

That old story again. . . . He glanced round the court and saw Biles's lean face. Several women in the public part of the court were gazing at him. A new sense of excitement thrilled him. He sat up and folded his arms on his chest. When would this insufferable trial end, and he be free to walk once more in the open air with Echo under the trees? He would tell her everything then, about Grizelda, and the red scar which Grizelda had laid on him, about his finding of herself, and the realization of her that had come to him. And he would beg her forgiveness. . . .

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"It will be made clear to you," the lawyer's voice rasped, "that nobody except Diarmid could have disposed of Raoul Featherstone's body. Dr. Eustace Hailey, the eminent mental specialist, will be called to inform you that he examined Diarmid's motor-car a few minutes before Diarmid drove away in it on the journey which ended in the burning of the car. At that time the car contained neither body nor statue. Dr. Hailey, with his own eyes, saw the statue being placed in the car at the late Colonel Dudley Titling's house. It will be for you, Gentlemen of the Jury, to ask yourselves why Diarmid encased this unhappy young man's body in plaster of paris, and why, having so encased it, he attempted to destroy it utterly in the manner which I have described."

Thank God that was finished. Alaister watched Ralph Herrick rise and begin his address. Herrick possessed a pleasing voice. He found himself listening.

"If these two people are, in fact, guilty, then they have murdered without a motive. If Alaister Diarmid had lost the woman he loved to Featherstone, a motive for crime might conceivably exist. But in fact Featherstone and not Diarmid was the loser. The prosecution ask you to believe that Featherstone became violent when Miss Wildermere told him that she was going to break off her engagement. It was, they suggest, this violence which roused Diarmid to a greater violence. I hope to show you that, at the moment in question, Featherstone was deeply under the influence of a poisonous dose of laudanum which he had just swallowed. I do not seek, however, to hide the fact that Diarmid feared that Miss Wildermere might have acted rashly. All his actions are explicable in terms of that fear.

RED SCAR

"As to who inflicted the wound on Featherstone, I shall not venture to speculate. Enough if I persuade you that this young man, who was constantly in trouble with women, was certainly not wounded by Diarmid."

Echo nodded approval of this speech. She exchanged smiles with Herrick. Alaister watched the slight flush which had risen to her cheeks fade away from them again. He summoned his powers of attention.

CHAPTER XLII

"A TERRIBLE BLOW"

WHEN Ralph Herrick rose to cross-examine Lionel Leyland, Dr. Hailey leaned forward in his seat. The crisis of the trial, so far as the defence was concerned was, he realized, at hand.

The young barrister began by asking Lionel Leyland if Lolotte, Alaister's housemaid, was in the room on the occasion when he told Echo about the relations of Raoul Featherstone with his wife.

"Yes, I think she was." Lionel spoke slowly, with difficulty. His head was bandaged and he seemed to suffer some pain in it, for he kept pressing his hand against his brow.

"Could you be quite certain on that point?"

The witness thought a moment; suddenly his face cleared.

"Oh, yes, of course I could. I remember now that Diarmid told the girl to cover up his statue and that she knocked it over and smashed it. She came in with tea, in the first instance."

"So that she heard what you said about Raoul Featherstone?"

"She must have done. Yes, I suppose I was too upset to bother about her presence."

"Did she smash the statue before or after she heard what you said?"

"After she heard."

"Immediately after?"

"Yes. Within a minute or two."

Dr. Hailey glanced at the faces of the jurymen. He saw with satisfaction that they were listening intently. Herrick had made his first point exactly as such a point ought to be made, clearly without over-emphasis. And he had contented himself with making that one point. Phyllis Leyland followed her husband. She told the jury the story which she had already told the police. . . . She broke down several times in the narration, and once she expressed the view that her cousin Alaister was incapable of committing any crime. The judge told her to confine herself to matters of fact. When counsel for the prosecution suggested that the figure she had seen running away from the studio on the night of the tragedy might have been a man and not a woman, she declared positively that she had seen a woman. Herrick fastened on that piece of evidence.

"Did you recognize the figure?" he asked.

"No."

"Does that mean that this was someone you had never seen before?"

"I have no idea who it was."

"Have you ever seen your cousin Alaister's housemaid, Lolotte?"

"Oh, yes, often."

"Could you say that the figure you saw was not Lolotte?"

"No. It might have been her."

"A TERRIBLE BLOW"

Kennedy, the butler, was called. He entered the witness-box with calm dignified steps. He glanced round the court while the judge was administering the oath. He declared that, until awakened by the police on the night of the tragedy, he had seen and heard nothing. He made a move to leave the box after he had concluded this statement.

"Have the goodness to remain where you are," the judge ordered him.

Herrick began his cross-examination in very quiet tones.

"Where is your daughter, Lolotte, Mr. Kennedy?"

"I don't know where she is."

"Really. But surely you have some means of communicating with her."

"No, sir. Lolotte left 'ome after the 'ouse in Frogmal Lane was closed. We 'ad a tiff, she and I, and she said as 'ow she was going to take a place for 'erself. I 'aven't 'eard nothing from 'er since then."

"May I ask what you quarrelled about?"

Kennedy hesitated before replying.

"My daughter 'ad a 'igh regard for Mr. Raoul Featherstone," he stated at last, "whereas I 'ad formed a low opinion of 'is character."

"I see. Your daughter knew Mr. Featherstone well, then?"

"Only by 'is comin' to visit Mr. Diarmid."

Herrick leaned forward and fixed his eyes on the butler's face.

"I am going to suggest to you," he said, "that that answer is not the whole truth."

His face was curiously intent, so much so that Dr. Hailey found himself awaiting Kennedy's reply

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with almost breathless interest. Herrick, it was obvious, was daring a line of attack of his own.

"It is the whole truth."

"Come, come! You can't ask us to believe that a girl will cut herself off from her father and her home merely because her father differs from her about the character of a visitor to somebody else's house."

"She 'ad taken a great liking to Mr. Featherstone." Kennedy's confusion was evident.

"Whereas you had taken a great dislike to him?"

"Yes, sir."

"On what grounds?"

Again the butler hesitated. His hesitation gave Herrick the answer he wished for.

"Why not be honest, Mr. Kennedy," he exclaimed, "and admit that you knew of a relationship between your daughter and Mr. Featherstone and very naturally feared its consequences?"

Kennedy did not reply, but he hung his head.

"You don't deny that you knew of such a relationship?"

"It may have been so. I can't say."

The butler kept clasping and unclasping his hands. Beads of sweat were standing on his brow. But Herrick had further questions to ask him.

"Will you tell me if I am right in believing," he said in very low tones, "that your worst fears about your daughter had unhappily been realized?"

The question produced a dead silence in court. It caused Dr. Hailey to start slightly in his seat. The doctor adjusted his eyeglass and fixed his eyes on Kennedy's face. He saw the blood slowly ebb

"A TERRIBLE BLOW"

out of Kennedy's face. The man reeled in the box.

"Yes, sir."

Herrick paused, and then suddenly declared :

"So you do know, after all, where your daughter is living ?"

The colour returned to the butler's cheeks.

"I do not."

"You mean that you turned your daughter adrift ?"

"I did not turn her adrift ; she left me of her own free will."

"When did she leave you ?"

Kennedy thought a moment. "The day Mr. Diarmid was arrested . . . early that morning."

A hush had fallen over the crowded court. Dr. Hailey allowed his eyeglass to drop. He began to tug on the cord by which it was suspended. Alaister was listening eagerly. The doctor glanced at Echo and observed that her face had become rather paler. Herrick asked :

"Did your daughter tell you, on the night of the tragedy, that she had visited Mr. Raoul Featherstone's studio ?"

"No, sir. My daughter went to bed that night at ten o'clock. She always went to bed at ten o'clock."

"She might have left her bedroom, might she not, and gone out ?"

"I don't think so."

"You have already said, remember, that you are a heavy sleeper, and that you heard nothing on the night of the tragedy until the police awakened you. . . ."

Again Kennedy looked confused.

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"Will you please tell me," Herrick requested, "when you became aware of your daughter's intimacy with Mr. Featherstone?"

"After 'e was wounded."

"How long after?"

"The next day."

"She confessed to you?"

"Yes." Kennedy glanced anxiously round the court. He grasped the front of the witness-box as though he sought to support himself. "My daughter told me," he added in low tones, "that Mr. Featherstone 'ad promised to marry 'er. The news that 'e 'ad been killed came as a terrible blow to 'er."

"I see." Herrick consulted a note which he held in his hand. "Did you get the impression that your daughter really believed that Mr. Featherstone intended to marry her?" he asked.

"I did, sir. My Lolotte was always a good girl, even if she did make 'er mistake."

The judge asked Herrick if Lolotte was to be called as a witness.

"We tried to call her, my lord, but we have so far been unable to find her."

"That is rather extraordinary, isn't it?"

"It is very extraordinary, my lord."

The silence which followed was broken by a tinkling sound. Dr. Hailey bent down and picked up his eyeglass. With hands that were notably unsteady he tied together the broken ends of the cord by which the eyeglass had been suspended from his neck.

CHAPTER XLIII

SOMETHING WRONG

THE court adjourned for the day at the conclusion of Herrick's cross-examination of Kennedy. Dr. Hailey walked into the witnesses' room and possessed himself quickly of his hat and coat. Then he strode out into the darkness of Newgate Street. He crossed the street and stood with the collar of his coat turned up, watching the door from which he had just emerged.

When Kennedy appeared at the door the doctor took a step back so as to throw his face into the shadow. Kennedy stood for a moment looking up and down the street and then walked away briskly in the direction of Ludgate Hill. Dr. Hailey followed him, but the surging crowd of city workers, beginning to pour from offices and shops, rendered the task of following exceedingly difficult. When the doctor emerged from Newgate Street Kennedy had disappeared. Dr. Hailey crossed Ludgate Hill and jumped on a bus. He climbed to the top of the bus and stood gazing at the crowded pavements until the conductor requested him to sit down. When the bus reached the top of Fleet Street he abandoned the hopeless quest. He descended and called a cab.

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He drove to Harley Street and told Jenkins to order his coupé at once. Then he walked into his consulting-room and slipped his electric torch into his pocket. A few minutes later he was driving alone through Regent's Park, towards Hampstead. His face wore an expression of deep anxiety.

He left his car in Church Row, near the old Parish Church, and walked quickly across Heath Street to Flask Lane. He entered the bottle-neck of the lane on the side opposite to Kennedy's house. There was a light in the window of Kennedy's house. He crossed the lane and came back to the house. He knocked loudly on the door.

It was opened immediately by a young girl with red hair whom he recognized easily as Lolotte's sister.

"Is your father at home?"

"No, sir. He hasn't come back yet."

"You're expecting him back?"

"Yes, sir, any minute."

Dr. Hailey removed his hat.

"I must see him at once," he stated. "If you don't mind I'll come in and wait for him."

The girl offered no objection. She shut the door carefully behind him and then conducted him to the sitting-room. She lit the gas-fire in the room and drew the faded red blinds.

"Who shall I say it is?" she asked.

"Dr. Hailey."

She started slightly and her face became troubled.

"You were at the court to-day, weren't you?" she asked. "I saw your name in the evening paper."

"Yes." Dr. Hailey stood in front of the fire with his hands behind his back. "It is very unfortunate

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that nobody knows where your sister has gone to," he remarked.

He watched the girl as he spoke and saw the troubled look in her face become intensified.

"I don't know why," she exclaimed, "but I feel so dreadfully nervous about Lolotte. It isn't like her to go away."

"I think your father is nervous about her, too."

"Oh, yes. Dad's terribly upset. That's why he sent for me. . . ." She broke off, and then added: "You see, my aunt, that's Dad's sister, has her own house still. She had to go home a week ago.

Footsteps approached the door and the doctor remained silent, listening to them. They passed and grew faint.

"Your name is Anita, isn't it?" he asked. "Your father spoke about you when I was here last."

"Yes."

"As a matter of fact, it's about your sister that I've come to see your father."

He paused. Anita took a quick step forward. . . .

"Not . . . oh, please tell me if there's anything wrong. . . ." Lively fear possessed her eyes.

"I don't know. Nothing has been heard of her. Nobody, not even the police, can find her."

"It looks as if there must be something wrong, doesn't it?"

The girl's tones were strained. It was obvious that this anxiety had been preying on her mind for many days and nights.

"I think it does."

"And yet Dad says there's nothing to worry about, really."

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Dr. Hailey sat down beside the fire.

"Your father told the court this evening," he stated, "that your sister had been under the impression that Mr. Featherstone was going to marry her. Did you know that?"

"Yes." Anita blushed scarlet as she spoke.

"You mean that your father told you?"

"No. Lolotte told me the last time I saw her."

"Did she . . . Do you think that she really trusted Mr. Featherstone?"

"Oh, yes, I know she did. That's Lolotte's weakness, sir, putting too much trust in everybody." Again the girl blushed. "I know she trusted him because she told me that I didn't ought to go foolin' about with young chaps seeing that marriage was so sacred an affair. . . . 'How will you like to think, Anita,' she said, 'that you've been makin' yourself so cheap when you meet the man that really and truly loves you as you love him?' "

The doctor sighed. New footsteps approached the house, and he listened to them until they had passed. He glanced at his watch.

"Did your father say that he would come back here after the court?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. I've got his dinner ready for him now."

"Your aunt has been ill, hasn't she?"

"Not really ill, but she had a bad foot, Dad says, before she went away. He was dressing it for her with some stuff the chemist gave him. . . ."

"Iodoform. I can smell it. Once you get that smell into a house you can scarcely get it out again. I suppose your aunt took her iodoform away with her a week ago."

SOMETHING WRONG -

"Yes, sir, she did."

The doctor took his snuff-box from his pocket and opened it.

"Does your aunt live in London?" he asked in casual tones.

"Oh, no sir. She lives at Shenley, near Barnet. Her husband had work on the roads, you see, and they had their cottage by the year. She hasn't been able to get the cottage let, though her husband's been dead more than two months. Dad's driving just now for Mr. Wallace in the High Street and he got leave to take her out in one of the cars. . . ."

A light flickered at the window. Next moment there was a sharp knock on the front door. Anita started and turned pale. . . .

"Will that be the police?"

She ran to the window and lifted a corner of the blind. A sigh of relief escaped her.

"It's a telegraph boy."

She left the room and returned a moment later with a telegram fluttering in her hand.

"It's from Dad. . . . He—he's not coming back to-night."

She raised frightened eyes to her visitor's face.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE COTTAGE IN THE WOOD

DR. HAILEY returned to his car and drove out to Barnet. He called on one of the local practitioners there, Dr. Wheelwright, an old friend, who received him with very great pleasure. He asked Dr. Wheelwright if he had attended the Shenley road-mender in his last illness.

"I did, as it happens. He died of pneumonia a few months ago."

"Then will you tell me exactly how to reach his cottage . . . so that I can't possibly make any mistake."

The local doctor raised his shaggy eyebrows, but he knew his friend well enough not to bother him with questions. It was obvious that Dr. Hailey was labouring under some severe anxiety and that he did not wish to be delayed.

"You drive right through the village," he stated, "and continue on the road for about a mile, till you come to a cross-roads. The cottage stands back, in a little wood, beside the cross-roads, and its gate is actually at the crossing."

"Thank you. That's exactly what I wanted." Dr. Hailey descended the steps of the house. He turned at the bottom of the steps to ask the road-mender's name.

"Paterson."

THE COTTAGE IN THE WOOD

The road to Shenley leaves Barnet at the top of the hill, on the side opposite to that by which the Great North Road leaves the town. It is flanked for a mile or more by new villas, but after that the country is open. Shenley itself is a mere hamlet, a collection of cottages bound to one another by rose gardens.

Darkness had fallen when Dr. Hailey reached the village. His headlights showed him a deserted roadway, though here and there he could see the gleam of a lighted window. He drove on into the narrow roadway which, winding deliciously among meadows, comes at last to St. Albans. When his lights revealed the cross-roads, he drove the car on to one of the broad strips of grass by which, on either side, the road was flanked. He extinguished the lights on the vehicle and walked towards the cottage. He found the gate of the cottage very easily by means of his electric torch. He moved the beam of light over the grass in the neighbourhood of the gate and observed the tracks of a big car which had, apparently, visited the place. Then he opened the gate and passed into the wood which surrounded the cottage.

There was a light in one of the windows of the cottage, but the window was curtained. He approached the lighted window and stood listening. The night was full of silence. He was about to advance still nearer when a faint sound of moaning came to his ears.

The moaning was rhythmical, like an intensified breathing. It was so subdued that he had great difficulty in hearing it, but he had no doubt that it came from the inside of the cottage. He bent down and moved forward very cautiously until his

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hands encountered the wall. He put his ear to the wall.

He could hear the moaning distinctly now and he recognized its character. Its rhythm became disturbed as he listened; there was a moment of silence and then a shrill cry broke eerily on the night. The cry was followed by whimpering, like the whinings of a dog under the lash.

The doctor crept along the wall to the window. It was possible that the curtain might not completely cover the window and that he might be able to obtain a glimpse of the inside of the apartment. When he reached the window that hope was disappointed. But he could hear better in this position than at the corner of the house.

A shadow fell on the curtain. . . . He started back into the darkness, fearing that the curtain was about to be drawn back. The shadow developed revealing a woman with her hat on. Then it became blurred again as the woman passed across the room. The click of a latch was followed by the sound of steps on a stone passage. Dr. Hailey retired quickly from the circle of light. He saw the door of the cottage open. The woman emerged, and stood listening.

He could not see her clearly because the passage behind her was dark. It was obvious that she had heard him. That could only mean that Kennedy had not yet reached the cottage. He stepped forward into the circle of light and raised his hat.

A scream sounded in his ears.

At the same instant he heard quick steps behind him. He tried to turn round, but darkness, deeper than the darkness of night, enveloped him.

CHAPTER XLV

REALITY

IT was announced at the beginning of the second day of Echo's and Alaister's trial that Dr. Hailey had met with a motoring accident on the previous evening and was now lying at a nursing-home, unconscious, as the result of a severe head injury. Kennedy, who was in court, described how he had found the doctor lying inside the car near his sister's cottage, and had driven him back to London. The car, he stated, had apparently struck a brick wall.

Echo was the first witness for the defence. She entered the box with firm steps and gave her evidence in a clear tone of voice. Nor did the severe cross-examination to which she was subjected shake that evidence in the slightest. Alaister followed her. He told the jury frankly that his actions had been dictated by fear that Echo might, momentarily, have lost control of herself. Sir Mark Wilson, the leader for the Crown, fastened on that admission.

"You are engaged to Miss Wildermere, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you believed her to be capable of murder?"

There was a sneer on the lawyer's lips. Alaister caught his breath. He had meant to explain everything : now he knew that he could offer no explanation.

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"If you like," he exclaimed in bitter tones.

His answer produced a silence which was menacing. The judge broke it by asking :

"Do you really mean that you feared that Miss Wildermere had murdered Featherstone?" He emphasized the word "murdered".

"My—my lord I feared that she had quarrelled with him and wounded him in the course of the quarrel."

"That is rather different, isn't it?"

Alaister experienced a sense of shame that it had been left to another to undo the bad effect of his lack of control.

"It is entirely different." He thought a moment and then added: "My knowledge of Featherstone's character made it seem probable that he had given Miss Wildermere occasion to defend herself."

Sir Mark Wilson shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Surely you know," he said, "that for a woman to kill in defence of her honour is not a crime?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Then why if what you say is true did you act as if Miss Wildermere had committed a crime? Why did you take such great pains to dispose of Raoul Featherstone's body?"

"I took no pains to dispose of Raoul Featherstone's body. I did not dispose of it."

Again the lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you any idea," he asked, "how the body found its way into your car?"

"None whatever."

"Or how it was hidden in your house if it was not hidden in your statue?"

"No."

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Sir Mark adjusted his spectacles.

"You made, in all, three casts of the statue, didn't you? The first was smashed, I think, by your house-made; the second found its way to your car; the third was broken by yourself to convince the police that it contained nothing?"

Alaister assented. "I made the third," he stated, "so that when I removed the second its absence would not be remarked. The second, as I have told you, contained Miss Wildermere's hat and cloak."

"I see. And during all this time Raoul Featherstone's body was lying somewhere in the house?"

"It certainly was not."

"It must have been if it was not hidden in your second cast. How otherwise could it have reached your car?"

"I don't know."

"You agree that it could only have reached your car from your house? I mean that there was no time between Dr. Hailey's inspection of the car and your own departure in it, to have brought the body from anywhere other than the house?"

"Yes, I agree to that. The body must have been brought from the house."

"And, in fact, it could not have been brought from the house, seeing that the police had searched the house from floor to ceiling several times over without finding it."

Alaister frowned. "I am as much in the dark on that point as you are," he declared.

When he left the box his place was taken by Mr. Oliphant, the chemist, and the jury were told the story of the broken glass stopper and the bottle of laudanum. Then Ralph Herrick rose to make his

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closing speech. He invited special attention to the relationship which had apparently existed between Raoul Featherstone and Lolotte Kennedy, and recalled the fact that Lolotte had broken Alaister's cast a moment after hearing that Featherstone was engaged to Echo. She had, on her father's showing, been greatly distressed when Featherstone died, and she had actually left home as the result of a dispute with her father about Featherstone.

"I ask you, Gentlemen of the Jury," Herrick urged, "to set these facts side by side with the information about the stopper of the poison bottle which has been placed before you, and also with the fact that Mrs. Lionel Leyland saw a woman running away from Featherstone's studio at a time considerably earlier than that at which Miss Wildermere visited the studio. If you do this, I think that you are bound to see a connection between these circumstances and events which cannot be explained on the ground of mere coincidence. The manner in which the stopper is broken indicates that it was hurled to the ground. That, again, indicates the presence in the studio of somebody who was under the influence of strong emotion. Moreover, of somebody who had everything to lose by Featherstone's death. Can such a description be made to fit either of the prisoners? Is it conceivable that, if Featherstone had told Alaister Diarmid that he had just taken poison and had shown him the stopper, Diarmid would have dashed the stopper to the ground? Diarmid had nothing to lose—and nothing to gain—by Featherstone's death. I feel sure that, in such circumstances, he would have taken immediate steps to summon a doctor."

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Herrick paused for a moment, and then added in very quiet tones :

"The girl, Lolotte, on the contrary, had everything to lose by Featherstone's death."

He paused again and consulted his notes.

"Featherstone himself, remember, was under the influence of opium. He remained in the excitement stage of opium-poisoning, as a result of the alcohol he had imbibed and of the drugs which had been supplied to him in the chemist's shop. His nerves were dreadfully on edge and he was ready to fly into a passion at the slightest provocation. Ask yourselves, gentlemen, what must have been the effect on his nerves of the smashing of the glass stopper. Dr. Hailey told you yesterday that the victim of opium-poisoning often, in the first stages of that drug, becomes violent and attacks people. Is it not probable, in the highest degree, that Featherstone attacked the person who had challenged and insulted him by smashing the stopper? *There was a rack of knives hanging on the wall of the studio, ready to the hand of that person.* Finally, gentlemen, can anybody say that Featherstone did not die of opium-poisoning?"

The rustling sound which filled the court when Herrick resumed his seat testified to the strained attention with which his argument had been followed. But the faces of the jurymen did not suggest that that argument had resolved all their doubts. Sir Mark Wilson rose in an atmosphere which was certainly not hostile. He promised the court, in a few smooth opening sentences, that he would not detain it by attempting to answer all the points which his friend had raised.

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"For why," he asked, "should I attempt to answer them? If this poor girl, Lolotte, was indeed on intimate terms with the dead man, she doubtless had cause to regret her folly. Raoul Featherstone was no saint. But her actions, I venture to think, and those of the male prisoner form so striking a contrast that she may be dismissed absolutely from the case. She apparently regretted Featherstone's death, and quarrelled with her father about it, and that was all. Diarmid, on the contrary, exercised every sort of ingenuity to defeat the attempts of the police to discover the man's body. He lied, he bullied, he behaved in a threatening manner, and he carried into execution a plan which, but for the watchfulness of Dr. Hailey, might easily have achieved its object. Can any impartial person suppose that Diarmid may not have broken the glass stopper about which we have heard so much? The man is violent by nature; all his methods are violent methods. He may not have stood to gain anything by Featherstone's hate, but he possessed—do not forget it—substantial reason for hating Featherstone."

Sir Mark's speech occupied only fifteen minutes. Mr. Justice Tyndale began his summing-up at four o'clock in the afternoon and finished it at five o'clock. At half-past five Alaister saw the jury filing back into court to record their verdict. For the first time he felt a sense of the harsh reality of the proceeding. He sat back stiffly in the dock. Then he relaxed sufficiently to turn to Echo. They exchanged smiles.

"Gentlemen of the Jury, have you considered your verdict?"

"We have."

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"Do you find the prisoners 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty'?"

"Guilty."

Alaister started at the ill-omened word. He made a movement to rise which was instantly countered by the policemen who sat beside him. He heard a harsh voice pronouncing his name and asking him if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced on him according to law. A torrent of rage surged up from his heart to his head, blinding him. His cheeks suffused with blood. He opened his lips, but to his surprise no words passed them. He heard the question being addressed also to Echo. Somebody put a grotesque-looking black cap on the top of the judge's wig. The judge began to speak in low tones which betrayed the fact that he was very much distressed.

"I cannot but agree with the verdict of the jury. . . . There is no doubt that you and your accomplice did this unfortunate young man to death and then exhausted all the resources of fertile minds to hide your crime from the eyes of your fellows. The sentence of the court is . . ."

Alaister did not hear the sentence of the court. He was gazing spellbound at Echo, who was actually smiling.

CHAPTER XLVI

DR. HAILEY GIVES HIS REASONS

WHEN Dr. Hailey recovered consciousness he found himself lying in a strange room. He tried to look round the room and discovered to his astonishment that he could not turn his head. His mind became blank the moment he endeavoured to think why these things should be.

The next time that his darkness was lightened he heard people talking close beside him. He caught a few words here and there of their conversation. But he could not understand it. He opened his eyes and saw a nurse speaking to a doctor. . . . He moved his hand and tried to thrust the bedclothes away from his face. . . .

"Well, old friend, you're better."

The voice sounded familiar, but he couldn't remember where he had heard it. He closed his eyes again. When he opened them the room had become dark, as though night had descended suddenly on the world. . . .

"He's been more or less unconscious now for four weeks. . . . I wonder if we ought to reopen the wound."

The voice became indistinct, but at last he had heard and understood. He opened his eyes again and saw Sir Milligan Maclean, the surgeon, looking

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at him. He tried to nod to Sir Milligan. There was a period of confusion and then suddenly he knew himself wide awake. Sir Milligan was still there, but this time clothed in an operating-apron.

"What has happened?"

"Keep quiet, old man. It's all right."

Dr. Hailey raised his head from the pillow.

"Thank you, I feel perfectly well. Tell me what has happened." He put his hand up to his head and discovered thick bandages. . . . "Good God! . . . have I been to the wars?"

"I've just finished dressing your wound. We had to reopen it a week ago; it has almost healed." Sir Milligan sat down on a chair at the bedside. "I suppose you don't remember anything about the accident, now?" he asked.

"Accident? What accident?"

"There, don't disturb yourself."

Sir Milligan rose and left the room. A nurse came to the bedside with a temperature glass. She examined the glass to make sure that it was shaken down. Dr. Hailey watched her for a moment, and then asked:

"Will you please tell me where I am, and why I'm here?"

The girl glanced at him a little uneasily.

"This is the Arkwright Nursing Home."

"What? Do you mean to say . . ." Again he passed his hands over his head. "Have I . . . there wasn't an operation, was there?"

"Yes, doctor."

Sir Milligan returned to the room. Dr. Hailey struggled to raise himself on his elbow.

"For God's sake tell me exactly what has

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happened!" he exclaimed. "I am as clear in the head as you are."

"We trephined . . . five weeks ago. You were found near Barnet lying in your car with a depressed fracture. . . . You had run into a wall in the dark. . . ."

The surgeon chose his words as if he was determined to shorten the conversation as much as possible. But his patient was too alert to be circumvented in that fashion.

"It is absolutely untrue, my dear Maclean," he stated in earnest tones. "I ran into no wall, and I was not found lying in my car. . . . On the contrary I was clubbed on the head."

— He raised his eyes to the surgeon's face and saw incredulity there. Sir Milligan nodded in a perfunctory way.

"Really . . . really!" he exclaimed.

"May I ask who told you the story you have just told me?"

"I—I'm not quite sure."

"Very well, I can enlighten you. That story came from Kennedy, Alaister Diarmid's butler. Am I right?"

"I—I think you are."

There was a moment of silence, and then suddenly Dr. Hailey stretched out his hand and grasped the surgeon's wrist. . . .

"Diarmid!" he cried. "What has happened about them? How did the trial end?"

Sir Milligan flushed as though the necessity of discussing such a subject with his patient distressed him.

"They were both found guilty."

DR. HAILEY GIVES HIS REASONS

Dr. Hailey's grasp tightened. . . . "Have they appealed?" he demanded in hoarse tones.

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Good God, you don't mean to say that—that—Maclean, for Heaven's sake tell me the truth. Has the execution taken place?"

"No."

"When is it due to take place?"

"The day after to-morrow."

Dr. Hailey sank back on the pillows, and then immediately raised himself again.

"Maclean!" he cried, "will you promise me to send Ralph Herrick here to-day, this afternoon?"

His expression was so anxious that Sir Milligan promised. But there was a lack of confidence in the surgeon's tones which betrayed the direction in which his mind was moving. Nevertheless he kept his word. Shortly after six o'clock Dr. Hailey was told that Ralph Herrick had reached the nursing-home.

"Send him up at once."

The young barrister entered the room very quietly. He wore the look of a man who has come to humour the whim of a sick friend.

"I am so glad," he said, "to hear that you are so very much better."

Dr. Hailey bade him sit down.

"I am, or at any rate I feel, perfectly well," he declared. "I suppose Maclean's second operation relieved my brain from some pressure which had been affecting it continuously. I want you to realize that it is a sane, clear-headed man and not a half-demented man who is speaking to you."

"Of course. . . ."

"No, there is no 'of course' about it. In your

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place I should probably think as you think. Now, listen to me. . . ." Dr. Hailey described in detail his visit to the cottage at Shenley and the circumstances which had attended that visit. He concluded: "I was attacked from behind, probably by Kennedy himself. Kennedy no doubt had seen my car as he came towards the cottage. Whatever damage the car suffered was Kennedy's doing, not mine."

He paused and sat up in the bed.

"Put these pillows behind me like a good fellow," he requested. "I can talk and think so much better when my head is raised." He breathed heavily for a moment or two, then he told Herrick that he had heard the result of the trial and the appeal. "This is Monday. Do you realize that two days hence, unless you and I prevent it, an innocent man and an innocent woman are going to the gallows?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Suppose? It's the truth."

Dr. Hailey had his eyes fixed on Herrick's face as he spoke. He saw in Herrick's face the same sheer incredulity which he had seen in Sir Milligan's face. He braced himself for a great effort.

"The case turned," he said, "on the fact that apparently nobody but Alaister Diarmid could have put Featherstone's body into the car. Am I right?"

"Quite right. The judge in his summing-up made that the crucial point."

"Because nobody except Alaister, with his plaster cast, could have hidden the body in the house?"

"Yes."

"And yet it was admitted that, if by any chance the body could have been hidden in the house, it

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could easily have been put into the car between the time that I examined the car and the time that Alaister drove away in it?"

"Oh, yes." Herrick's eyes were quite blank.

"It did not occur to you to question whether the bones which were found in the burnt-out car were really Raoul Featherstone's bones?"

The barrister shook his head.

"I didn't think it was worth while following up that line of defence."

"Yet the bones may not have been Featherstone's. You admit that?"

"Possibly not."

"The bones cannot have been Featherstone's." Dr. Hailey's tones were slightly strident.

"Why not?"

"Because Alaister did not encase Featherstone's body in his cast."

Herrick contracted his brow. "How can you be sure of that?" he asked.

CHAPTER XLVII

A MAN DIGGING

DR. HAILEY felt a great weakness stealing over him. He struggled against it, and for a moment regained his clearness of mind.

"I asked you to come here," he said, "in order that you may, yourself, prove the truth of what I have told you. I want you now to go to Scotland Yard and see Inspector Biles. Tell Biles that you have talked to me, and that I am convinced that the solution of this mystery is to be found in the road-mender's cottage at Shenley. Get him to accompany you to the cottage to-night."

Dr. Hailey's voice grew faint. He sank back on the pillow and closed his eyes. The nurse came to his side, and a moment later the room was darkened. He fell into a profound sleep. When he awoke the morning sun was shining into the room.

"Where is Mr. Herrick, nurse?"

"Mr. Herrick?"

"He was here a little while . . ." Dr. Hailey sat up suddenly. "What day is this?"

"Tuesday."

"Good God. . . ." He pointed to the telephone which stood on a table placed well out of reach of the bed. "Please ring up Scotland Yard at once."

A MAN DIGGING

"Sir Milligan's orders are that nobody is to use the phone in this . . ."

The nurse broke off and uttered a cry of dismay. Her patient had quitted his bed. He snatched up the receiver before she could prevent him. She heard him give a number.

"Is that Scotland Yard? . . . I want Inspector Biles. Dr. Hailey speaking. Yes, I'll hold the line."

The nurse brought a chair, but Dr. Hailey refused to sit down. She threw his dressing-gown over his shoulders. . . .

"Hailey speaking. Did you go out to Shenley? . . . You did. Well? . . . What, nothing there? Wasn't Kennedy there? . . . My dear Biles, the house is not empty. Did you ask Kennedy to take you into each of the outhouses? . . . I'm afraid Kennedy's made a fool of you."

Dr. Hailey's voice lost its enthusiasm as he spoke the last words. He hung up the phone and turned to the nurse at his side.

"They think, because my brain was injured, that I'm not to be trusted. They think I'm talking nonsense."

"Please go back to bed, doctor."

"I can't." Dr. Hailey pulled on his dressing-gown. "Will you please find out for me if Sir Milligan is in the house?"

The nurse went away. He sat down and rested his head in his hands. He felt weak, but not so weak as he had expected to feel. His eyes, when he greeted Sir Milligan, were resolute.

"What sort of nonsense is this, Hailey?" the surgeon demanded. "Surely as a doctor . . ."

RED SCAR

"My dear friend, I've got no option. I've awakened into a world which regards me as feeble-minded."

"I forbid you absolutely to go out. . . ."

Dr. Hailey shook his head. "I'm awfully sorry, really," he stated, "but I'm going to disobey you."

The surgeon regarded him with narrowed eyes. Sir Milligan was no fool, and he recognized iron determination when he saw it. He refrained from uttering threats of disaster which had rushed to his lips.

"Very well," he said dryly, "you must, of course, please yourself." He turned to the door and then stopped. "I shall be here for some time. My car is at the door and is at your disposal."

Dr. Hailey did not avail himself of the surgeon's offer. He spent an hour dressing and then, very slowly, like a man who reserves his strength for future use, descended the stairs of the home. He instructed the man at the door to call a cab and stood waiting until the vehicle came to the kerb. That effort was exhausting but he felt as he entered the cab that he had not spent his strength in vain. He had made a beginning towards winning his way back to self-confidence and self-control. He gave the driver his address in Harley Street.

Jenkins received him with obvious delight, and supported him into his consulting-room. Dr. Hailey asked his servant if he was willing to run a considerable risk in the interests of justice.

"'Ow d'ye mean, sir?"

"I am going to-night back to the place where I got my head broken."

"Very good, sir."

A MAN DIGGING

"What does that signify, Jenkins?"

The doctor's large face beamed on his old friend.

"It signifies, sir, that wot's good enough for you is good enough for me."

Dr. Hailey gave Jenkins an account of his own reading of the case as they drove out to Shenley in the big Daimler.

"What took me to the road-mender's cottage," he stated, "was Kennedy's evidence on the first day of the trial. You read the evidence?"

"Every word wot was spoken, sir."

"I asked myself what really had happened to Lolotte and thought that I had got an answer to that question. But I reckoned without Kennedy. Now that I know Kennedy a little better I feel surer than before that my answer was the right one. Kennedy, my dear Jenkins, is one of Nature's criminals."

The doctor paused. He closed his eyes and for a few moments remained silent. The car glided past Tally Ho Corner.

"If there had been no Raoul Featherstone to turn the head of poor Lolotte, Kennedy would never, probably, have discovered the fact that he possesses a cool, daring, unscrupulous mind. He made that discovery, I feel sure, when Lolotte, trembling and with bloodstained hands, came to his bedroom and told him she had killed Featherstone. In that moment the quiet efficient butler was changed out of recognition."

Again Dr. Hailey paused. "You and I, Jenkins," he said at last, "are not fathers. It may be that if we were and if we experienced the same sort of shock, we'd be changed, too. I think we'd be ready to go to pretty nearly any length to save our daughters."

RED SCAR

"That's sure, sir."

"But 'pretty nearly any length' isn't *any* length, remember. We'd probably stop short at . . . murder."

The car passed through Shenley village. The sky had cleared and the moon shone feebly among the trees. Dr. Hailey raised the speaking-tube and told his driver to stop as soon as he saw the lighted window of the cottage at the cross-roads. When the car came to a standstill he ordered the driver to remain at the wheel.

"Keep your eye on the cottage, Morton. If you see a light flashed twice in quick succession drive up to the cottage door and force your way into the house."

"Very good, sir."

Jenkins gave his master his arm and they moved slowly through the moonlight to the garden gate. Suddenly the doctor stood still.

"Listen !"

They heard a faint, thumping sound which seemed to come from the back of the cottage.

"I'll wait here, Jenkins. Creep round by the shrubbery on the left of the house and see what's happening. . . ."

Jenkins moved away. The doctor leaned against the trunk of one of the trees. There could be no doubt that Kennedy would fight like a tiger to protect his secret and so save the honour of his name. From the beginning, apparently, his daughters had meant more to this man than anything in the world. Jenkins returned.

"Well ?"

"It's a man, diggin'." Jenkins's voice weakened a little. "'Ope 'e ain't diggin' a grave, sir, but it do look uncommon like it."

CHAPTER XLVIII

GAS

DR. HAILEY gripped Jenkins's arm.

"Help me to get round there," he requested.

He leaned rather heavily because the muscles of his legs had begun to tremble under the strain; once he very nearly pitched forward on the ground, but the sight of the digger labouring in the moonlight steadied him.

"It's Kennedy."

"I 'ad the same impression myself."

"There's not a doubt of it. It must be a grave that he's digging. My God! what's that?"

Dr. Hailey began to sniff the air. He turned suddenly towards the back of the house. A cry escaped his lips.

"Gas. . . ." He released Jenkins's arm. "I want you to stay here," he whispered, "and I warn you that you may need all your strength."

He walked towards what seemed, in the moonlight, to be a small shed built on to the back of the cottage. The single window of the shed was unlighted and moonbeams played on it as it swung backwards and forwards in the wind. He came to the door of the shed and laid his hand on the latch. The hiss of the escaping gas was distinctly audible from the door. He listened and thought that, in addition to

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the hiss, he could hear a faint sound of moaning. He gathered all the strength that he possessed for the task he was about to perform.

And then, suddenly, the idea occurred to him that the window had been left open to enable Kennedy to turn off the gas when the work of the gas should be finished. He thrust his hand through the open window and felt about in the inside darkness. His hand discovered the gas-pipe, an ordinary burner. He turned off the gas.

His knees shook beneath him and he felt his heart thumping against his ribs. He moved away from the window and leaned against the side of the house, out of sight of the digger, the sound of whose methodical labours had not ceased for a moment. The room evidently was full of gas. It was scarcely possible that a concentration which had powerfully affected himself standing outside the window had not killed . . .

"Good God! what was that?"

Dr. Hailey glanced across the garden to the shrubbery where he had left Jenkins. Then he staggered to the door of the shed. He flung the door open and advanced into the room, holding his breath as he did so. He came to the window and thrust his head out in order to breathe himself. Then he bent down with his arms outstretched. His hands encountered a crouching human form.

He tried to raise the wretched victim and found his strength unequal to the task. Again he put his head out of the window. The gas was beginning to exert its influence and he felt giddy and weak. Yet the cry which he had heard showed that Kennedy's victim was not dead. . . . Perhaps Kennedy's

GAS

victim had been lying asleep under the bedclothes when the gas was turned on. At any rate enough strength had remained to allow of the crossing of the floor to the window. . . . He bent again and again renewed his effort. But again he was forced to desist. He leaned heavily on the window-sill.

A cry broke from his lips. Jenkins and Kennedy were struggling together on the blanched earth of the garden.

Their locked bodies, a monstrous shadow, swayed to and fro in the uncertain light. And then suddenly the shadow was sundered. One of the men stood alone over the prostrate body of the other man. A moment later Dr. Hailey saw Kennedy's lean face approaching the window. The moonlight revealed the features of Kennedy's face distinctly. The man stood still a few paces from the window and began to feel in his pockets. Instinctively Dr. Hailey realized that he was searching for a box of matches. With a gasp of horror the doctor drew back from the window and pulled it shut. He held his breath while he adjusted the catch. Then he bent down and seized the huddled figure and began to drag it along the floor to the door. He was just able to drag it.

When he had completed about half of the distance to the door he was compelled to draw breath. His heart began to thump again immediately and the dreadful weakness which so easily beset him laid new hold on him. He reeled and fell and then by a supreme effort regained his feet. He put forth all his remaining strength. . . .

A shadow darkened the space of the doorway. He heard a mocking laugh which seemed to discount

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every hope and then the dry rattle of matches, shaken in their box, came to his ears. He stood erect awaiting the stroke of fate. . . .

Strong light pierced his brain. . . . He felt himself lifted up and hurled into impenetrable night.

.

The red glare of the blazing cottage awoke him. He lay for a few minutes watching the lambent flames which rose from the roof of the building. He tried to move and realized with a dim sense of wonder that he retained the use of his limbs. Nor did he seem to be burned though his clothes smelt of singeing. He staggered to his feet. The light revealed two bodies lying some distance from him—Kennedy's body and another. Kennedy lay quite still but his companion was moving.

Dr. Hailey turned to look for Jenkins. He swayed on his feet and would have fallen had not his driver, Morton, caught him in his arms.

"It's all right, sir."

"Where is Jenkins?"

"I've taken him to the car, sir. There was an explosion. . . ."

The doctor leaned heavily on his man's shoulder. When his breath returned he gave his man a number of instructions in gasping tones which, nevertheless, were urgent and peremptory.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE TOOL-SHED

THE Governor of Pentonville Prison, Colonel John Bonarvy, visited Alaister as soon as intimation reached the prison that a reprieve would not be granted. He told the condemned man that he must prepare himself for death on the following morning at eight o'clock.

"Very well, sir."

Alaister knew himself calmer than the Governor, who seemed greatly distressed.

"May I ask you, sir," he queried, "if a reprieve has been granted in the case of Miss Wildermere."

"I think not."

"What! Do you mean to say they are going to hang her also to-morrow morning?"

The Governor stiffened slightly.

"I believe that her execution has been fixed for nine o'clock," he stated, "at Holloway Gaol."

Alaister caught hold of the edge of the wooden table with which the cell was furnished. All the blood fled from his cheeks.

"What a delicate attention," he sneered, "to grant a woman a later start on her journey."

The Governor went away. Alaister sat down on his bed and tried to think what the news which he had just heard meant. He found it difficult to realize

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its meaning, and yet he had often, in his morbid times, pictured himself in the condemned cell waiting to hear the steps of the hangman. He knew by heart every move in the work of hanging a man. The hangman would come in briskly. He would wear white gloves. He would shake hands with his victim and say that he regretted the duty which had been imposed on him. Then he would begin to strap his victim's arms to his sides. . . . Involuntarily Alaister stretched out his arms. . . . After a man had been pinioned he could never again stretch his arms out freely in this world.

He raised his eyes and saw that the two warders who shared the cell with him were watching him. They averted their gaze when he looked at them, but he knew that they would watch him again the moment he turned away. He lay down on the bed and began to feel drowsy, but very soon he sat up again because if he fell asleep he might not wake until the hangman was in his cell and then he would never again be able to stretch out his arms. No, no, that was wrong. A condemned man was always wakened at six o'clock in the morning.

He had not yet allowed himself to think about Echo, but he knew that, before the night was out, he must think about her, and what they were going to do to her. He felt, somehow, that it would be cowardly, even disloyal, to refuse these thoughts.

Thank God he knew now that Echo was innocent.

That thought was still in his mind when he sat, dressed in his own clothes, but without a collar, awaiting the coming of the hangman. . . . It sustained him when brisk steps approached his cell

THE TOOL-SHED

. . . when he shook the white-gloved hand . . .
when his arms were bound to his body.

Warders surrounded him. They all began to walk along the corridor to the open air. He raised his eyes and the sunlight of morning filled them. He heard the distant voice of London as he was accustomed to hear it on his own lawn in Hampstead. . . . The sunlight was darkened though when they entered the tool-shed. He saw a screen with people behind it. In front of him a rope dangled, and there were chalk-marks on the floor to indicate where he must stand.

Somebody behind the screen gabbled some official formula. Then he stepped on to the drop. The hangman, he knew, was behind with his hand on the lever. One of the hangman's assistants strapped his legs together and another assistant put the noose round his neck. . . .

"Stop. . . . Stop. . . ."

Steps came rushing across the flagged pavement to the shed.

Alaister felt his knees shake beneath him. . . . He would have fallen if the warders on each side of him had not supported him. He heard a breathless voice speaking close behind him. He caught the words :

"Raoul Featherstone . . . alive . . . in the porter's lodge."

CHAPTER L

MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION

DR. HAILEY remained seated when the Governor of the Prison entered the porter's lodge.

"Thank God we weren't too late!" he exclaimed in feeble tones. . . . "It was touch and go. Featherstone's lying in my car at the main door. He's terribly burned, I'm afraid. . . ."

The Governor wiped his brow with a big handkerchief. He hesitated a moment and then strode out of the lodge. When he returned his face was very stern.

"I've sent that poor creature away to hospital," he stated. He drew a sharp breath. "How do you know that he is, in fact, Raoul Featherstone? Your driver has just told me that neither he nor yourself ever saw Featherstone before his alleged death. This fellow seems to have been starved to a skeleton."

His voice thrilled with anxiety. What if, after all, he had stopped Alaister Diarmid's execution when that execution ought not to have been stopped . . . if he should have to order it to begin again!

"Because," Dr. Hailey said, "the man has a frightful septic wound in his neck, in the exact place where Featherstone was wounded. And because this letter was found on the person of Kennedy, Alaister Diarmid's butler, who, as it happens,

MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION

lost his life last night as the result of an explosion of gas by means of which he had hoped to kill both Featherstone and myself. Kennedy's body was searched by my order."

As he spoke the doctor took an envelope from his pocket. He drew two sheets of notepaper from the envelope.

"This letter," he stated, "was addressed to her father, by Kennedy's daughter, Lolotte, who, as you will remember, was a maid in Diarmid's house in Hampstead. It runs as follows :

"MY DEAREST DAD,

"Oh, do try to forgive me. I just can't live without Raoul, and so I am going to join him.

"You remember that you gave me mother's wedding-ring when she died. Well, I have put it on to-night because I am sure that Raoul and I are husband and wife in God's sight.

"Tell the police the truth about me. . . . I know they will pardon you for taking Raoul's body away and trying to hide it because you did it to save

"Your ever loving daughter,

"LOLOTTE.

"P.S. I enclose a note for the Coroner."

Dr. Hailey turned that sheet of notepaper over and read on :

"THE HAMPSTEAD CORONER.

"DEAR SIR,

"I wish to say that I stabbed Mr. Raoul Featherstone in a fit of madness. I love him,

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and so I am going to put my head in the gas oven at my employer's house, 40A Frogna Lane, Hampstead, N.W.3.

"My father took Mr. Featherstone's body away in my employer's car and has hidden it at our home in Flask Lane. He is innocent. So is Mr. Diarmid and everybody else except,

"Yours remorsefully,

"LOLOTTE KENNEDY."

Dr. Hailey handed both the letters to the Governor and then, with difficulty, adjusted his eyeglass.

"Poor Lolotte," he remarked, "she did not know that Raoul Featherstone was not even mortally wounded but was merely heavily drugged with laudanum. Had she only waited till her father returned from Hampstead she would have learned that the man they had both supposed to be dead the night before was rapidly recovering his wits."

He paused. He saw that the anxiety in the Governor's face had not yet abated.

"When Kennedy found his daughter lying dead in the kitchen," he added, "his first impulse was to hide the fact of suicide—just as his first impulse the night before had been to hide the fact of murder. He had another daughter and he was determined, if possible, to shield her. I suppose he imagined that, if Lolotte's body could be taken home, it would be possible to say that she had died naturally in her sleep.

"And so he did again what he had done on the previous night. He carried his daughter's body out to his master's car, meaning to convey it there and then to his home in Flask Lane. Unhappily,

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just as he had deposited the body in the back of the car Alaister Diarmid himself came out of the house and drove away."

Again the doctor paused. His eyeglass fell from his eye.

"You remember, no doubt," he said, "that the police found a wedding-ring among the charred bones."

"They also," the Governor declared, "found among the bones certain articles of jewellery worn by Miss Wildermere."

"Quite so. Alaister Diarmid had encased Miss Wildermere's bloodstained hat and cloak in his cast. It was to burn Miss Wildermere's hat and cloak that he set fire to his car. In the excitement of the chase from London he had no opportunity of discovering the presence of Lolotte Kennedy's body in his car. . . ."

The Governor sat down on one of the wooden chairs with which the lodge was furnished.

"I don't see," he declared coldly, "how all this has entitled you to identify Featherstone."

"My dear sir, if Featherstone wasn't in the blazing car, it stood to reason that he was still hidden in Kennedy's house. I went to Kennedy's house. The place reeked of iodoform. I suspected at once that Featherstone's wound had become septic and given rise to blood-poisoning. If so, Featherstone must, I knew, have grown delirious; Kennedy would be afraid to keep him in Flask Lane. I learned that there was available to the butler a quiet cottage in the country of which his sister was the tenant. . . . I went there and found my man delirious, as I had expected."

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Dr. Hailey took a pinch of snuff.

"Kennedy, you see, could afford to take some risks because Featherstone was supposed to be dead. He held absolutely in his power the man who had ruined his daughter. I think that, from the moment when he realized that Lolotte's body had been mistaken for Featherstone's body, he was resolved on murder. A visit which Inspector Biles made to the cottage at my request yesterday hastened the carrying out of his resolve. The fact that his revenge could only be obtained by allowing his master and Miss Wildermere to go to the gallows does not seem to have disturbed him. There, if I may say so, my dear Governor, you have the type of criminal who is moulded by Nature herself rather than by force of circumstances."

Dr. Hailey opened his snuff-box again, but it fell from his hands. He swayed in his chair and must have fallen had not the Governor caught him in his arms.

CHAPTER LI

A LONELY MAN

ALAISTER and Echo were with Raoul Featherstone when he died in hospital a week later. When they left the hospital they drove to the nursing-home to which Dr. Hailey had returned. They found the doctor sitting up in his room talking to his man, Jenkins. Dr. Hailey received the news of Raoul's death without surprise.

"I was fortunate," he said, "in that I was standing up when the explosion occurred. The gust hurled me beyond reach of the flames which followed it, or I must have shared Featherstone's fate. Jenkins has just been telling me that Kennedy was killed by a blow on the head from a piece of the flying debris." He broke off and raised his eyeglass towards Alaister. "Am I correctly informed that you have decided not, after all, to show your statue of Andromeda?"

"Quite correctly. I withdrew it from the list two days ago." Alaister's expression was strangely gentle as he spoke. The doctor saw his eyes turn to Echo's face. His eyes seemed to be full of contentment.

When Alaister and Echo had gone away to their Hampstead garden Dr. Hailey sat for a long time gazing in front of him with vacant eyes. He had

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vowed once, years ago in the darkest hour of his life, that the sight of the happiness of others should never make him feel sad, and he wished now, earnestly, that he might be enabled to keep his vow. . . .

He reminded himself that Echo had said that the doors of her home would always, at all seasons, stand wide open to receive him.

When the nurse came to his room a little later he was sleeping. The nurse noticed that a smile seemed to be hovering about the corners of his mouth.

THE END



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